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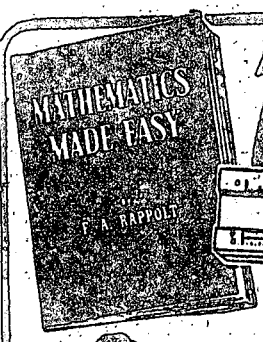

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The Editor's Notebook

A CONFIDENTIAL CHAT WITH THE EDITOR

WE ARE writing this column with mixed emotions. One of 'em is relief, because this issue is finally about ready to go to press. You can infer from that that we had one hell of a lot of trouble getting it together. Something someone once aptly termed "the perversity of inanimate objects" had a lot to do with it. Ever have a day, or a week, or a month (as in our case) when everything goes wrong and even pencils perversely refuse to write?

MAYBE a resume of what happened to us as we began to whip this issue into shape would be interesting—and maybe it wouldn't! But we'll take a chance. First, we discovered, very late, that one of the stories (we won't tell you which one) had several very serious flaws. So, we had to sit down and rewrite nearly 5000 words of it! Also we had to cut several other stories.

WE WOUND up with a shortage of words and had to hunt up a story to add to the book. Here is where you readers got a break! That extra story was "The Miracle of Kicker McGuire" by a fellow we'll be indebted to for life. Thanks, Robert Moore Williams, for a gem right in the nick of time!

THIS story's about a bunch of kids who are playing war, and suddenly it becomes very real for the kids, and for the grownups interested in those kids. You'll get a real wallop out of this yarn!

RIGHT in the middle of all this trouble, our super-back-cover artist, Frank R. Paul, seems to have disappeared. No answers to telegrams and his phone is disconnected. The army? We still don't know! And we needed a back cover to carry on the ancient gods series . . .

WELL, you've no doubt noticed by now that one of the most famous fantasy artists of all time came to our rescue. J. Allen St. John, the original Tarzan illustrator, did a sweet job of pinch-hitting for Paul. We think you'll like this cover.

SPEAKING of covers, the front cover is by St. John's most apt student, H. W. McCauley, featuring the Mac Girl we promised you, our own very lovely secretary. And the story's written around the cover by William Brengle, a newcomer to our pages, but not a newcomer to the field of fiction. Confidentially, you've read a lot of his stuff in other magazines; we pirated him from an unsuspecting detective reading public!

THE story itself requires special mention because it really is a sequel to Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*. A group of present-day people find themselves on the island of Lilliput, and plenty of exciting things happen among the tiny people of the island. You'll meet many of the famous characters again.

NEXT came news from Robert Bloch that he was having troubles, and he was hard-pressed to get Lefty Feep on the beam again. It seems hard luck dogs Bob's tracks, and we do hope that his wife's recent illness has been cleared up. Even Lefty Feep has to stand aside for that. But the show must go on, says Bloch, and Lefty's in this issue with "Genie With the Light Brown Hair," one of the funniest of the Feeps to date.

DON WILCOX was next in line for trouble; he lost the services of his typist. Right here, the brotherhood of authors was demonstrated. Harold Lawlor, who owes much of his growing success to Don, came to his rescue and did all the tedious typing on several great novels that are coming up in the next issues of both FANTASTIC ADVENTURES and *Amazing Stories*, our sister magazine. But in spite of that, we have Harold Lawlor's sequel to "Daughters of Darkness," which tickled your funny bone last month.

THE balance of our troubles were mostly "inanimate" objects, which we settled by the simple expedient of swearing fluently at them. But the rest of our stories still require mentioning, so here goes.

NELSON S. BOND obviously had a lot of fun writing "Saint Mulligan," a story of an Irish cop who acquired, of all things, a halo! We won't tell you what happened; just read it for yourself. The story's worthy of Bond.

ALEXANDER BLADE does a weirdy about a demon who comes back to life. "Return of a Demon" is guaranteed to chase the chills right up and down your spine. But don't read it at night!

(Continued on page 228)

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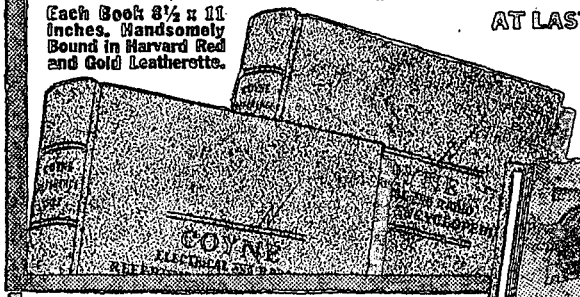

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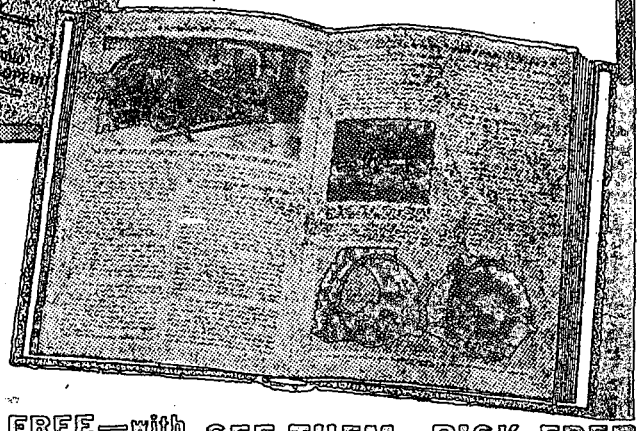

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RETURN TO LILLIPUT

By WILLIAM BRENGLE

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Five Americans escaped from Japanese-held Java to the modern Lilliput. All was well until two of them turned up missing . . .

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CHAPTER I

Escape

"BOUCHAIX!"

The faint whisper reached the ears of the man huddled on damp straw in one corner of the hut. Instantly he rolled over and sat up in the darkness.

"Bouchaix! Are you there?"

The almost inaudible words seemed to come from beyond the rear grass wall. The man within the hut got quickly to his feet and tiptoed across to that point.

"Bouchaix! This is Captain Douglas. Can you hear me?"

"Yes, sir," the man in the hut whispered, his lips close to the grass wall. "This is Bouchaix."

"Good!" The relief in the unseen voice was unmistakable. "Listen closely. Three of us have arranged to make a break for it. Want to come along?"

There was no mistaking the enthusiasm in Bouchaix' reply. "Absolutely, sir! What shall I do?"

"Keep watch at the doorway. If you spot an approaching sentry, break into a fit of coughing. Meanwhile, we'll rip out an exit for you in this wall. Got it?"

"Yes, sir."

"Okay. Watch that door."

Drexel Bouchaix, machinist in the Eighth Tank Corps, United States Army, moved hastily to the doorway of the rude hut. Dropping to one knee on the damp earth, he peered intently into the lesser gloom outside. Not more than a hundred yards distant was a section of the circular stockade enclosing the prison camp. Except for three heavily armed guards grouped about a small, flickering fire a few feet to one side of the narrow gateway at that point, there was no one in sight.

From where he knelt, Bouchaix could see other small circular huts of grass similar to his own. Most of them housed several of the American prisoners of war. At first he had had three cellmates; but two had died under the wanton cruelties of the Japanese guards, while the third had succumbed from jungle fever two days before.

He caught himself breathing jerkily and there was a noticeable tremor about his lips. The killing humidity of Java's climate brought a thin coating of perspiration to his body, dampening still more the tattered, grimy remains of his uniform.

Suddenly his shallow breathing caught in his throat. One of the guards about the fire had risen to his feet and, with his rifle held loosely in the crook of his arm, was walking slowly toward the center of the camp, seemingly headed toward Bouchaix' own hut!

Instantly the machinist made his decision. The leisurely pace of the yellow-skinned soldier was evidence that this was a routine patrol. At any moment, now, the guard might alter his course; and were Bouchaix to break into a spell of coughing, it might bring the sentry to investigate.

The American forced his eyes to concentrate on a patch of stubble-covered ground some ten feet in front of his door and directly in the path of the approaching man. If the other had not turned aside before reaching that spot, then Bouchaix would give the signal.

The guard came steadily forward. Drexel Bouchaix, fists knotted in an agony of suspense, kept his eyes locked on that bit of ground.

And still the man came on. The machinist parted his lips as a prelude to a racking cough.

ABRUPTLY the sentry turned sharply to his left and disappeared be-

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hind the neighboring hovel.

So intense was the wave of relief that washed over Bouchaix that he could barely remain erect. He came unsteadily to his feet and leaned limply against the door jamb, fighting to regain control of his shaken nerves.

A crepitant rustle at his back brought him sharply around. A dim shape was pushing through a light patch on the heavy blackness of the hut's rear wall.

"Bouchaix?" came a dry whisper.

"Ready, sir."

"Come on."

On hands and knees Bouchaix followed the dim figure through the break in the wall. Strong arms hauled him to his feet.

The young machinist was barely able to make out the three indistinct shapes hugging the wall. He swallowed, said, "I'm here, sir," in a low voice.

"Right." Bouchaix recognized the voice as that of Captain Douglas, an officer of his own corps. "Remove your shoes quickly, tie the laces together and suspend them about your neck."

Unquestioningly, Bouchaix bent to obey. A moment later he straightened. "It's done, sir."

"All right, men," the captain murmured. "Follow my lead. Keep crouched over as far as possible without losing balance. And for God's sake don't blunder into anything!"

Like disembodied spirits, the four men slipped soundlessly through the night. Several times the captain altered his course, evidently doubling in his tracks, until none of the others knew one direction from another.

Suddenly a section of the heavy wooden stockade loomed in front of them, its upper edge twelve feet above the ground.

"This is it, boys!" Captain Douglas sought to keep his voice expressionless, but a slight quiver betrayed him.

Quick alarm caused Bouchaix to break the bonds of discipline. "But, Captain, we can't get over. There's a high-voltage wire strung along the top of the entire stockade. It's death to touch it!"

Douglas said, impatiently, "We know all about that. Keep quiet."

At a whispered word from the officer, one of the others peeled up his ragged shirt, disclosing a dark mass covering his torso from waist to armpits. Holding his shirt up with his chin, the man fumbled at his waist for a moment; then the mass uncoiled from his body, resolving into a long rope. In a matter of seconds, the rope was recoiled neatly on the ground.

NOW Douglas knelt and quickly tied one end of the line about a square white stone, not much larger than an ordinary brick. This done, he straightened and handed the rope-bound missile to one of the group.

"Here you are, Gregg," he whispered hoarsely. "Judge your distance carefully; the first throw must be good. This rope is damp; if it comes in contact with that live wire we won't be able to touch it."

Gregg said, "You're telling me!" in a tight voice. He took the stone in his right hand, retreated a few steps parallel to the stockade, and glanced up.

Bouchaix, face tilted upward, strained his eyes to identify that which Gregg was studying. Dimly he could make out a black, amorphous shape overhead, a good ten feet above the rim of the fence.

Gregg, his expression hidden by the darkness, bent far over to his right until the knuckles of that hand seemed almost to scrape the ground. For a brief instant he froze into that position; then suddenly his body whipped erect with tremendous power and his right

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arm flashed skyward.

The carefully coiled heap of rope melted away as the flung stone mounted into the wet air. There followed a few seconds of utter silence.

From above the waiting men came a sudden rustle and the crackle of disturbed foliage. An instant later, a grayish blob plummeted toward them from overhead, narrowly missing Captain Douglas' head. Leaves and a few broken twigs fluttered down on the shoulders of the four men.

Gregg sprang silently forward and caught the swinging stone. "I told you I could do 'er!" he whispered loudly, pride strong in his voice. "I didn't play outfield two years for Kansas City for nothin'!"

Douglas said, "Make sure the branch will hold your weight. Do it gradually, though; if it breaks sharply, the guards may hear it."

A moment later, Gregg made his report. "She'll hold, Cap. Leastwise, the branch will. I'm not so sure about the rope; it's pretty skinny."

"We'll have to chance it . . . Very well, men; here's the picture: This rope is looped over a good stout branch roughly twenty feet from the ground. Each of us will have to shinny up that distance. When you reach the limb, give the rope a twitch, then move over to the trunk of the tree and wait. Do so quickly, as that branch may not support the weight of more than one man. . . . Everything clear?"

There was a chorus of affirmative whispers.

"All right. The lightest will go first. You, Mudd—" the captain indicated a tall, slender figure, dim in the gloom "—lead off."

"Yes, sir," Mudd said in a loud whisper. He stepped forward, rubbed his hands briskly against his khaki-covered thighs and took hold of the twin strands of rope.

The others watched tensely as he drew himself steadily upward, hand over hand, until he disappeared into the blackness overhead. The seconds seemed to drag. . . .

AND then Gregg, who was holding the nether ends of the rope to steady them, uttered a whispered ejaculation.

"There's the signal; he made it!"

"Good!" Douglas' voice shook a little with exultation. "Now, I'd better go. Bouchaix, you follow me; you weigh less than Gregg. Think you can manage alone, Gregg?"

"Easy!"

"Fine." And the captain swarmed rapidly upward, his lithe, broad-shouldered frame soon lost from sight.

A long moment inched by. . . . Abruptly Gregg straightened and let go his hold on the rope.

"He's up. It's your turn, fella. Good luck."

Bouchaix dried his hands carefully and caught hold of the double strands of mingled grass and entwined bits of cloth.

"Okay," he whispered. "Keep an eye out for the skibbies."

"Hah!" Gregg grunted. "Them dopes? They'll be runnin' around in circles in the morning, trying to figure out how we done it. Get goin'."

Drexel Bouchaix obeyed, swarming upward like a cat. Once, half-way up, his hands slipped momentarily on the damp material and his heart popped into his throat. He felt the rope sway inward toward the stockade, then caught a brief glimpse of naked copper wiring, strung along the edge of the fence.

The rope steadied, then, under Gregg's weight below, and Bouchaix clutched the clammy strands tightly

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and went doggedly upward.

Upon gaining the branch, he pushed aside the foliage and straddled the rounded surface. He hesitated briefly to steady his shaken nerves, twitched the rope briskly as a signal to the man below, and crawled gingerly along the swaying branch to the broad bole of the tree.

A hand reached out to steady him.

"That you, Bouchaix?"

He recognized the captain's voice. "Yes, sir." His eyes were growing accustomed to the pall of blackness and he dimly made out the figures of the other two clinging to the tree.

They waited. No one spoke. The dank, impenetrable ebon of a Javanese night pressed down on them.

Captain John Douglas, Eighth Tank Corps, United States Army, fumbled unconsciously for a cigarette in the pocket of his shirt, then swore absently to himself. Cigarettes had become an unfamiliar luxury since he and his men had fallen into Japanese hands almost two months before. He and Joe Gregg, a tank gunner, had occupied the same hut in the prison camp since then. Two others who had shared the rude shelter, were dead—one butchered by an officer's sword for alleged insubordination, the other a victim of jungle fever. Together, Gregg and he had worked out the details of escape. To attempt a wholesale escape would have doomed the entire enterprise; only at the last moment had they decided on including, at most, two more.

From the two huts nearest their own they had found Lanceford Mudd, a tall, gangling radio operator, and Drexel Bouchaix. Neither man had had any advance knowledge of the break, and it was a bitter testimonial to life in a Japanese prison camp that both had unhesitatingly agreed to join in the almost hopeless attempt.

THEY heard a stirring among the leaves, and Gregg joined them, panting a bit.

"All clear, Gregg?" Douglas asked quietly.

"Right, Cap. I brought the rope along. Can't tell; it might come in handy."

"It's quite possible. . . Now listen to me, all of you. We're about a mile inland from the coast and about the same distance west of the harbor at Tjilatjap. Several days ago I overheard one of the guards mention that a captured PT boat was docked there.

"We've got about an hour before dawn. What we're going to try to do —and I'll admit it's a long shot—is get to the harbor and grab that boat. Now, I'll agree that it may be in no condition to use; that the fuel tank may be empty; that it may be lying under the guns of a Jap battleship. But those are chances we'll have to take."

"There's sure to be guards around the docks, Captain," Bouchaix interposed. "What are we going to use for weapons?"

"Our hands, if necessary," Douglas said grimly. "We'll worry about that when the time comes. . . . It's going to be a tough job, all right. But by God, any chance, however slim, is better than lying around that hell-hole back there and gradually dying of kicks and rotten grub. Right?"

"Absolutely!"

"Damn right!"

"Precisely," said Lanceford Mudd, who had obtained a doctorate from Harvard University six months before the attack on Pearl Harbor.

Douglas' firm lips relaxed in a relieved smile. It was the response he had expected. "Then let's get on with it."

They descended gingerly to the wet, vegetation-covered earth. Pausing only

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long enough to get his bearings, Douglas struck out through the close-knit jungle, the others, Indian-file, behind him.

Half an hour passed. By now, every man was drenched to the skin with perspiration and jungle damp. Disturbed insect life attacked them without respite, and muscles, stiff from long disuse, throbbed painfully.

The second time a man stumbled, Douglas called a halt.

"We'll rest a few minutes," he decided. "We've made better time than I hoped. Another half hour should bring us out of this."

"Jeez, I hope so!" Gregg rasped. "I'm pooped."

They sank to sitting positions on the rotting vegetation of the jungle floor, and waited for their weariness to lessen. Drexel Bouchaix leaned his back against a tree bole and forced his thoughts into memories of the trouble-free days before the war—a trick he had developed to escape the maddening drudgery of prison-camp life.

He was lost in recollection of the time he was employed in Brooklyn as a garage mechanic, and the boss' daughter had wheeled in her twelve cylinder Packard to have the plugs cleaned. She slid from behind the wheel with a flash of silken hose, and they got to talk—

"Time to move!"

Bouchaix blinked as the mirage disappeared like an exploding soap bubble and the oppressive heat of Java's jungle smote him anew.

THEY stumbled ahead, once more, for several minutes. Suddenly, without warning, the heavens opened and choking torrents of rain poured down upon them. So heavy was the downpour that the four men were nearly beaten to their knees.

"Good ole rain!" Gregg shouted, to make himself heard above the storm. "This'll keep the yellow-bellies in their holes!"

"Double-quick, now!" Douglas yelled. "We're about out of this tangle."

Half-running, their feet churning the muck and mud, the bedraggled party came into the open. Heads lowered against the rain, they staggered ahead a few yards, then came to a halt at Douglas' sharp command.

"Look!" he cried. "There—dead ahead. Lights!"

The storm had begun to slacken, enabling them to make out a cluster of lights a few hundred yards away and slightly below the level of their present position.

"It's Tjilatjap, all right," Douglas declared. "We'll turn south until we reach the sea, then hug the shore until the docks are reached. No sense in going through the town if we can help it."

As they moved cautiously forward, the rain slackened, then ceased entirely. Dim, foggy light began to spread across the eastern horizon, enabling the Americans to make out the gray, soft outlines of objects.

Beyond a fifty-yard stretch of open ground, a low, wooden building loomed. Douglas said, "We'll skirt that building on the seaward side. If we're lucky, we won't run into anybody awake at this hour."

They reached the side of the structure without incident. Then, bunched together, they stole silently along the edge, moving toward the corner nearest the sea.

Without hesitating, they rounded the corner—and came face to face with a Jap sentry!

He was a little man in a rain-soaked uniform, his cap perched jauntily aside his head. At sight of the four huge

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figures looming out of the mist, he gasped in astonishment and jerked up the muzzle of his rifle.

But before his finger could find the trigger, a heavy shoulder struck him with terrific force squarely at the belt-line. The breath went out of the sentry with a whistling "whoosh" and he went down with Douglas' weight across his trunk.

And then Gregg, moving with the speed of a cat, was beside the fallen man. With one continuous motion he bent, scooped the heavy rifle from the partially unconscious Jap and brought the stock down on the brown-skinned skull with savage force.

There was a dull, sodden splintering sound; the body of the sentry heaved once, and relaxed in death.

DOUGLAS was on his feet. He pointed to the door the sentry had been guarding.

"In there!" he panted. "We've got to hide until we're sure no one heard us!"

He seized the door-knob, and without waiting to learn if it were locked, slammed his weight against the planks.

The door flew back on its hinges and Douglas, off balance from the force behind his efforts, shot half-way across the room until his flying feet tangled with a chair and sent him to the floor amidst the ruins of the chair itself.

He came up, shaking his head, to find his companions inside, the door closed, and Gregg pointing the dead guard's rifle at the room's original occupants.

Captain John Douglas' jaw sagged with astonishment. Not because of the presence of the short, round-bellied Japanese in the uniform of a high-ranking officer of the Imperial Japanese Army; that was more or less to be expected.

It was the officer's companion that was responsible for Douglas' almost ludicrous expression of disbelief. A girl—and *American* girl—of perhaps twenty-two or -three was standing with her back pressed against one wall, her right hand half-raised as though to ward off a blow. She was wearing a long, daringly cut evening gown, fuchsia in color, and a filmy scarf of the same hue was loosely bound about her wealth of reddish-gold hair. She looked beautiful and cool and clean, in sharp contrast to the four muck-covered, sweating men of her own country.

John Douglas' eyes flickered from her to the yellow-brown fear-ridden face of the Japanese officer, then back once more to the girl. A look of contempt and loathing spread swiftly across his face, as he noticed the table, laden with food and several wine bottles, from which the two had risen as the prisoners had burst in.

He said—and the scorn in his tone was unmistakable—"Sorry to have intruded on your little party, Miss. But some of your boy-friend's pals may be looking for us. So if the two of you will behave until we can arrange to get away from here, you can climb back into his arms in just a little while!"

Under the cold lash of his words, Elaine Purwin's face went white. Her astonishment at sight of these men had given place to understanding of what they were trying to accomplish; and she had been at the point of welcoming them, regardless of the consequences to her, when Douglas' insulting words struck her.

Sudden hatred for the tall, broad-shouldered American, handsome despite the stubble of beard darkening his sweat-grimed cheeks, flamed within her. She saw the same loathing for her and for what she appeared to represent, in the faces of the other Ameri-

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cans, and her offended pride tightened her lips to stopper up the explanation she had been about to offer.

THE Japanese officer said, in perfect English, "What do you want?" Fear showed in his dark, slanting eyes and quivering lips.

"Guns," Douglas said laconically.

The Nipponese pointed to a chest against the opposite wall. "You will find side-arms in there."

While Gregg remained with his rifle covering both the officer and his companion, his comrades pawed through a collection of pistols. When each had filled his pockets with ammunition for the gun he selected, Douglas came back to question the Jap.

He said, "There's an American torpedo boat in the harbor, here. Exactly where does it lie?"

"If I tell you," temporized the enemy officer, "will you agree not to molest me or my companion?"

"I'll promise nothing!" Douglas said savagely. "If you don't give me the information, I'll shoot you down like a dog!"

The Japanese looked into Douglas' eyes and made his decision. "It is tied up perhaps one hundred yards off the pier."

Douglas thought for a moment. Then he went back to the arms-chest and selected a pistol of Japanese make. After making certain that it was unloaded, he handed it to the puzzled officer.

"Here's the way we're going to work it," he explained. "All six of us are going to walk out of here and head for the pier. Gregg, you and Mudd and Bouchaix will walk a few feet in front of me and Hirohito will have his gun—empty, you know—pointed at you three; while the girl and I will walk at either side of him. To any one who sees us, it'll look like His Nibs is taking us down to the water front for some reason of his own. Maybe his rank will keep the other yellow boys from asking questions if they see us. And maybe not. We'll chance it."

He eyed the Jap menacingly. "And the first screwy move out of you, Hirohito, and you'll get a bellyful of lead. Understand?"

"Yesss!" hissed the Japanese officer, nervously.

They took their positions silently. Douglas noticed that the girl's face had taken on an expression so stiff and blank that it could hardly be called an expression at all. "Probably scared to death," he told himself. "She should be, the little tramp! Playing cozy with a damned yellow Jap!"

He gave a final glance at the positions of his companions, then nodded.

"Okay, Gregg," he said softly, "open the door. This is it!"

CHAPTER II

Afloat

THEY stepped out into daylight. The sky was completely overcast by low-hanging clouds, but dawn was near enough, now, for them to see their surroundings clearly.

Directly opposite to them and hardly more than a score of yards away, were the dull waters of the harbor. From where they stood they could see the length of a wooden pier jutting out into the harbor. The land end of the structure appeared to be not more than a quarter-mile to their east.

"Head for the pier," Douglas ordered. "It's a cinch there's some kind of row-boat along it someplace."

They moved hurriedly through the muck of what, in dry weather, was probably a roadway. The girl, in her

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toeless dress shoes, wasn't having an easy time of it, but John Douglas could find nothing of sympathy within him for her plight.

"I see her!" Gregg, just ahead of Douglas, sang out. He waved an arm seaward. "There's our PT boat!"

"Shut up, you f o o l!" Douglas rasped, g l a n c i n g hurriedly about. "You'll have half the Jap army here, yelling that way!"

He saw the sleek, streamlined craft that had brought the exclamation from Gregg. The boat lay with her stern toward the land, bobbing lightly on the incoming tide.

They were abreast of the pier, now, and the roadway underfoot forked to send a branch leading out onto the pier itself. A small wooden shed had been erected at this point, and through a doorless opening Douglas saw piles of cordage and miscellaneous ships' gear scattered about.

The group of six were in the act of passing the shed when a uniformed Japanese stepped into the road from behind it, a rifle ready in his hands.

And it was at that moment, just as the newcomer had opened his lips to say something, that the wily Nipponese officer made his bid for freedom.

Douglas' first intimation of what was happening came when the American girl was thrust forcefully against him. He staggered back, arms instinctively thrust out to save the girl from falling. He had a brief glimpse of their former hostage's rotund figure diving for the doorway of the hut.

Then several things happened almost simultaneously. Captain D o u g l a s shoved the girl aside and sprang for the fleeing Jap; Joe Gregg threw his Sunday punch at the slow-witted sentry; while Drexel Bouchaix snatched the revolver from the waistband of his tattered uniform and fired three shots.

The bullets from Bouchaix' gun hit the little brown brother at the identical instant that Gregg's fist connected. Either could have killed him; both made it a certainty.

Meanwhile, Captain John Douglas and the round-bodied enemy officer were locked in combat. The Japanese had closed with the American, his claw-like fingers searching for a jiu-jitsu hold. But Douglas slammed his knee into the other's groin, and as the man doubled over in agony, he brought his toe up in a vicious arc that ended flush against the point of the yellow one's jaw. There was a sharp "crack" as bone splintered under the impact, and the fat one collapsed.

Joe Gregg was already hauling the dazed girl to her feet. "Come on, sister," he snapped, "this is no time to rest!"

ON WAVERING feet, Elaine Purwin was jerked along in the wake of the four Americans as they fled out onto the pier. And then from behind them came the shouted crackle of Japanese voices, and half a dozen bullets keened scant inches above their heads.

Douglas whirled, leveled his gun and fired at the group of enemy soldiers running toward them with blazing guns. Two fell under his fire, and the others dived for cover.

"Get going!" the captain yelled. "We've got to reach that torpedo boat before the whole damn town is on our necks!"

Gregg, with an astonishing display of strength, swept Elaine's slender form to one of his wide shoulders, then turned and ran, his friends close at his heels. From behind them came a chorus of shrill yells, and several guns barked angrily.

The worn shoes of the running men made little sound against the planks of

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the wharf. Gregg, still in the lead, swerved abruptly when about half way to the pier's end, and slid to a halt.

"There's a dory!" he gasped, pointing downward.

"Into it—quick!" Douglas ordered. "They're moving up on us!"

Three of them, Gregg still carrying the girl's limp figure, dropped cat-like into the light craft. Douglas sent a hail of shots at the approaching enemy, saw them dart once more for cover, then slid into the dory. Quickly he cast off the line, scooped up the single pair of oars and sent the boat skimming away from its mooring place.

Bullets whistled over them or churned the water. But both Bouchaix and Lanceford Mudd, the latter a surprisingly excellent marksman, were keeping up a return fire that was holding the Nipponese at a distance. The shoreline appeared to be aswarm with soldiers, and already several small boats had been launched from that point.

Joe Gregg, who had unceremoniously dumped the thinly clad girl into the bottom of the boat, said, "Lucky for us there ain't a skibbie warship in port or we'd be in a hell of a fix!"

And now they were drawing rapidly up to the graceful, seventy foot motor boat that had been their goal from the moment they had scaled a stockade wall back in Java's jungle. While Douglas held the boat alongside, the others swarmed aboard, then Bouchaix helped the captain over the rail.

Joe Gregg, pistol in hand, stepped from the cabin as Douglas reached the deck. "There's no one aboard but us, Cap," he reported.

"Good! Now, if only she's fueled . . . Bouchaix!"

"Yes, sir?"

"You know engines. Get into the cockpit and kick these alive."

The mechanic, his square face wreathed with a smile, saluted briskly "Aye, aye, sir," he said, and ducked through the cabin door.

A VOLLEY of shots rang out from behind them and bullets marred the plywood surface of the boat's superstructure. A small motor launch was coming up rapidly to their stern, its sides bulging with Japanese soldiers.

Captain Douglas caught Elaine Purwin by the shoulder and shoved her roughly into the cabin, as Gregg and Mudd opened fire at the new menace. At that same moment the bark of gunfire was dwarfted by the chattering exhaust of powerful motors and the deck underfoot began to quiver.

From the cockpit above came Bouchaix' voice:

"Ready to go, sir!"

Douglas took a deep breath. "Cast off, Gregg. She's tied to one of those pilings forward. I'll help Mudd hold the sons of Heaven off."

"Right, Cap." Joe Gregg disappeared toward the bow of the ship.

A moment later, the PT boat began slowly to move toward open sea. The motor launch trailing them loosed a final fusillade and turned back. And, at that last burst of fire, Lanceford Mudd dropped his gun and clutched suddenly at his shoulder.

John Douglas sprang to his side, face tense with concern. "They wing you, soldier?" he demanded.

Mudd looked up, his eyes glazed with shock. "I fear, sir, that I have been wounded," he said in his characteristically stiff, almost pedantic way.

The captain saw the blood beginning to darken the shirt and swore with feeling. "Get into the cabin," he said. "Tell that girl in there to see if she can dig up a first-aid kit in one of the lockers. I'll dress your wound right away."

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The PT boat began to pick up speed. Bouchaix, knowing nothing of the location of possible reefs, was steering cautiously.

And then, above the roar of the Packard motors powering their craft, came a new sound—an ominous purr that struck John Douglas like a heavy fist.

"Gregg!" he yelled.

"Yeah?" The burly gunner was beside him.

"They're sending a plane after us! Come on; let's get to those machine-gun stations."

The two men dived through the cabin door. A moment later each was crouched behind the twin barrels of the .50 caliber guns, eyes watching a Zero fighter swooping toward the boat.

"Wait'll he starts his dive, Joe," Douglas yelled, "then pull back your triggers and leave 'em back!"

"Okay!"

The streamlined, wasplike plane, its red sun emblems clearly discernible, swooped above them, turned in a wide circle, then peeled off and came diving toward them like a gigantic bullet.

"Fire!" Douglas screamed, and depressed the fire controls of his own guns.

LEADEN death filled the strip of sky between plane and boat—leaden death that traveled both ways. The glass turret above Douglas blossomed a dozen white stars and bullets "thunked" against the wooden sides of his station.

"Rat-tat-tat-tat-tat-tat!" chattered the boat's four guns. *"Wheeeeeeee!"* A bullet ricocheted past Douglas' ear. Jaw set, eyes narrowed in determination, the officer stuck to his guns as the plane swelled larger and larger above them.

And then, suddenly, the plane was gone, the hail of hot death was stilled, as the Zero's pilot sent his craft zooming skyward again in preparation for another dive.

"He's sure to get us the next time," Douglas groaned inwardly. "Hey, Gregg!" he shouted. "You okay?"

"Damn right!' came an answering yell. "Never touched me. We get him next time, hunh?"

With sickening fascination they watched the silvery airship circle back for the second attack. Abruptly the sound of the engine overhead broke, coughed, steadied again, then coughed twice and ceased altogether. A cloud of black smoke began to pour from the nose.

"He's hit!" screamed Douglas, bounding from his seat. "We got him!"

Great gouts of brilliant flame were spreading along the forepart of the Zero. In thrilled horror they watched the pilot struggling to free himself from the cockpit. They saw the luckless Jap sink helplessly back; and the stricken plane, now a huge, flaming torch, began its last screaming dive toward the waters below.

The two men descended to the cabin, to find Mudd lying in one of the bunks, stripped to the waist, his shoulder neatly bandaged. Elaine Purwin, looking lovely and out of place in her flimsy evening gown, was putting a first-aid kit back in order.

"How do you feel, soldier?" Douglas asked, bending over the bunk.

"Quite well, Captain," said Lanceford Mudd weakly. "Fortunately the bullet passed completely through without striking a bone. Miss Purwin is quite skilled at dressing wounds."

The captain turned to the girl and their eyes met. She saw the cold, appraising glitter in the dark brown depths of his own, and she stiffened resentfully.

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"So your name's Purwin, hunh?" he said, more gruffly than he intended or realized. "What's the rest of it?"

Her blue-green eyes flashed and the soft lines of her lovely, full lips tightened.

"It's Elaine Purwin, if that's any of your business!"

An angry wave of red moved up from under Douglas' collar. "You bet it's my business," he snapped. "I'm in charge here, Miss Purwin, and don't you forget it. Our coming through this thing alive depends on the full cooperation of everyone on board; so don't let your obvious dislike of Americans interfere with our plans."

He turned on his heel before the scarlet-faced girl could reply, and stepped up into the open cockpit, at the forward end of the tiny cabin, to join Bouchaix.

THE mechanic turned a beaming face in his direction. "She's purring along like a kitten," he said. "I know these Packard motors like I do the inside of my hand."

Spray licked back to dot the windshield. The sea was quite calm, with the light, seventy-foot craft dancing over the swells.

"What's our speed?" Douglas asked.

"Little under sixty, right now," Bouchaix said. "She'll do eighty-five if she has to."

"Let's hope we don't have to," Douglas said grimly. He turned to stare back toward the wake of the boat. The coast line of Java lay like a light cloud far behind.

He turned back as a thought struck him. "What about fuel, Bouchaix?"

The man behind the wheel glanced at a gauge on the panel in front of him. "About three-quarters of a tank—fifteen hundred gallons."

The captain brightened. "Good! That should be enough to get us there."

"Get us where?"

"Darwin," was the reply. "Keep her headed due south, Bouchaix, for a while longer. Then we'll swing east. Way I figure it, we're about fourteen hundred miles east of Darwin right now."

For the balance of the day the little boat plunged onward into the south. Douglas realized that they were going too far in that direction if the shortest route to Darwin was to be considered. But it was quite possible that Japanese warships were patroling the ocean lanes to the eastward, and he hoped to circle beyond their routes.

The cabin lockers proved to be well-stocked with food, blankets, heavy sea-clothing—even cigarettes. An electric ship's lantern lighted the cabin. Gregg prepared hot food on a tiny electric stove and they ate, the men wolfing their portions with an eagerness that told of long months of semi-starvation.

Elaine Purwin, the upper part of her body clothed in a heavy pea-jacket and the long folds of her formal gown trailing below, picked thoughtfully at her dinner. She sensed the almost open hostility of the men toward her, and, her pride aroused, she pushed back the entirely human desire to offer an explanation that would make her one of them. Captain Douglas and the man they called Gregg were the worst; Bouchaix, while not cordial, was at least civil, and Lanceford Mudd was almost friendly in his reserved sort of way. Probably, she reflected cynically, the latter's friendliness was occasioned by his need for her medical attention. A first-aid course sometimes pays peculiar dividends.

Gregg rose, buttoned the heavy coat he had found about his neck, and went up to the cock-pit to relieve Bouchaix. Dusk was fading into night, by this time, and the balance of the passenger-

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crew turned in for the night.

MORNING broke on a dismal note. Heavy fog was hanging flush with the water, cutting visibility to nothing. There was absolutely no wind, and the Pacific moved in long, sullen swells.

John Douglas, at the wheel, had cut speed until the craft was moving forward at a pace only sufficient to keep the bow pointed into the waves.

He heard feet on the steps behind him, and Bouchaix and Gregg came up into the cock-pit.

"Okay, Cap," Gregg said cheerfully. "Better catch some sleep. Bouchaix and me will keep her runnin'. My God, look at that fog! Can't see ten feet past the bow!"

Douglas nodded. "Yes; you'll have to hold her down to a snail's pace until it lifts. Otherwise, you'd have no chance to avoid a collision if anything got in our way."

Gregg spat over the side. "Hell, there ain't a thing within miles of us. I oughta open her up, Cap."

"Do as I tell you!" Douglas said shortly. He was getting a little fed up with the other's lack of respect for his rank. Under normal conditions he would never have permitted it; but it seemed brass hat to expect it now.

In the silence that followed, he turned and went below. He reached the foot of the short flight of steps and was unbuttoning his great-coat when—

"Hard aport!"

Gregg's fear-filled cry jerked Douglas up the steps and into the cock-pit before the fog had smothered its echoes. Beneath him, he felt the boat tilt to one side under Bouchaix' automatic obedience to Gregg's scream.

And then Captain John Douglas saw it.

So close that it seemed almost at arm's length, almost obscured by streamers of fog, rose the sheer gray wall of a huge warship!

He saw something else, too; and even as he identified the limp flag, he was diving for the wheel. Without a word he thrust the amazed Bouchaix aside, shoved the throttle to its limit and waited.

And then the world erupted! A deafening blast smote his ears, smoke and flame belched from overhead. The afterpart of the PT's superstructure disappeared into flying splinters, and a great weight seemed to press the boat under the surface as a wall of water boiled into the cock-pit.

Douglas felt himself lifted into the air. Something caught him a stunning blow across the head, a blinding light seared his eyes, and he knew no more.

CHAPTER III

Adrift

JOE GREGG came out of the darkness mumbling something about "—off'n my leg, damn—", and opened his eyes.

At first, he was aware only of the dull gray of the planks under his face and an aching throb in his right leg. Then, as his mind began to emerge from its stupor, he twisted painfully about to learn what was pinning his hips to the deck.

Four heavy plywood planks lay across his legs. Slowly he turned himself until he could assume a sitting position, then bent and tugged away the boards, one at a time, until he was free of their weight.

The throbbing hurt in his right leg, he discovered, came from a long, thin splinter that had gashed the calf deeply and was still embedded in the flesh. Gritting his teeth, he wrapped his strong fingers about the fragment and,

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with a single jerk, tore it out. The wound began to bleed profusely; and with the idea of finding cloth for a bandage, Gregg got to his feet and looked about.

The sight of Captain John Douglas' body huddled beside a bent ventilator shaft, caused him to forget his own hurt, and he tottered to his side.

The officer lay on his back, knees drawn up and eyes closed. But his chest rose and fell evenly, and the breath whistled a little through his parted lips. An angry red bruise marked one side of his forehead.

Gregg knelt beside him and shook his shoulder. "Cap, hey Cap," he called hoarsely. "Are you all right? Snap out of it, Cap."

A hollow groan struggled from the throat of the unconscious man and he rolled to his side. Again, Gregg shook his shoulder. "Wake up, Douglas. Come on; wake up!"

John Douglas' brown eyes fluttered open. For a long moment he stared without comprehension into the worried face bending above him.

"It's Gregg," he muttered finally. "Where— What are we—"

"Easy does it, Captain," Gregg cautioned. "You must've taken an awful crack when that shell hit us."

Sudden understanding replaced the dazed glaze in the officer's eyes. "Of course," he mumbled thickly. "I remember. We stopped a big one from that Jap battleship."

He brought up a hand and took hold of Gregg's arm. "Help me up," he ordered. "We've got to find out what happened to the others."

The entire section of the craft's superstructure aft of the machine-gun turrets was a mass of twisted wreckage. The single shell evidently had struck the enclosure a glancing blow, shearing off a third of it before passing into the sea beyond. The balance of the cabin had partially collapsed, burying those within under the ruins.

The boat itself was rolling out of control under the wash of the waves. Luckily, there was almost no sea running or they would have long since been swamped. Both stern torpedo tubes had been torn to shreds; if they had not been empty when the shell hit, the little craft would have been blown to bits.

THE two men, their own hurts forgotten, dug frantically into the wreckage. After a few minutes they uncovered the thick-set figure of Drexel Bouchaix, his face a bloody mask from scratches and a furrowed scalp. Sea water, splashed into his face, brought him to full consciousness, and he joined in the search for the others.

They found the remaining two shortly thereafter. The girl was fully conscious and appeared to have suffered no wound; she had been lying on a bunk close to a side wall and the collapsing roof had missed her.

Lanceford Mudd apparently had taken the worst punishment. A long purple bruise marred the unshaven left cheek and he had bled slightly from the mouth. The left sleeve of his tattered shirt was blood-soaked; and when Douglas cut away the material with a splinter of glass from the wreckage about them, he found a long gash extending from elbow to wrist. Fortunately, no artery had been cut and the wound had stopped bleeding.

Elaine Purwin knelt beside the unconscious man. She had managed to find the first aid kit, and from it she took the bottle of iodine and a roll of gauze.

Without looking up, she said to Douglas, "If you'll remove what's left of his shirt, I'll dress this wound and

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take a look at the bullet hole in his shoulder."

Silently they watched her skillful fingers move over the torn flesh with calm efficiency. Yet, paradoxically, she seemed helpless and frail and very lovely in the wrinkled and stained fuchsia evening gown.

The bite of iodine brought Mudd from his coma, and Elaine dressed and bandaged the cut with swift certainty, after applying a fresh dressing to the hole in his shoulder. That finished, she cared for the wound in Bouchaix' scalp, and removed several tiny splinters from Joe Gregg's injured calf.

Bouchaix murmured his thanks when she had finished with him; but Gregg endured her ministrations in sullen, almost openly hostile silence. She was acutely aware of his attitude, but her expression remained tranquil. And when he rose and stalked away without a word, the only hint that his evident hatred had stung her was the heightened color in her cheeks.

Douglas waited until she had finished repacking the medical kit, then said:

"We'll have to clear away the wreckage and find out if the boat is still navigable. Lucky the sea is calm or we'd have gone under long ago."

"I can't figure out why that damn cruiser didn't finish us off," Gregg said.

"Probably thought that one shot sunk us," Bouchaix replied. "The fog was so thick we must've floated out of sight right after we were hit. And with our motor dead there was no way of locating us by sound."

Douglas nodded. "Sounds reasonable. . . . Come on; let's get busy."

THE three men set to work; Mudd, because of his injuries, was left with Elaine. An hour later, the last bit of loose wreckage jettisoned, Bouchaix began to examine the motors.

It wasn't long before he descended from the cock-pit and came aft to join the others. The expression on the mechanic's face told them his findings before he had uttered the words.

"Not a chance, Captain Douglas, sir. That damn shell busted hell out of the engines. She's finished. Oh, she'll answer the rudder all right, but our power's gone."

There was a long moment of heavy silence. Elaine Purwin's face whitened a little, and Lanceford Mudd swallowed. Otherwise, no one betrayed his emotions.

Douglas said, finally, "Then that's that. We've got food enough for some time, and there's plenty of water. We're bound to be picked up before our supplies are exhausted. Or we may drift onto an island. Personally, I'd rather it were the latter. The Japs appear to run the ocean around these parts, so there's not much chance that one of our boats will find us."

Bouchaix said, "About this power business. I stumbled across a big roll of sail cloth below. Maybe we could rig up a jury-mast and get some place."

The others brightened a little. "It's worth trying," Douglas said. "At least, it'll keep us occupied."

They spent the rest of the day working on it. The fog lifted finally under the impact of a light breeze from the northwest, revealing a late afternoon sun and unbroken wastes of ocean stretching to the four horizons.

Shortly before sunset, the mast was completed and the crudely cut sail unfurled to the breeze. The wind caught hold instantly; and with Bouchaix at the wheel, they began to make headway into the southeast.

They rigged up bunks from the wreckage that had not been thrown overboard. Gregg, despite the lack of tools other than a huge-bladed jack-

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knife, a hammer and small hogshead of nails, proved to be a capable ship's carpenter. Bedding they had in sufficient quantities; with tins of biscuits and jam and one of butter, and a case of canned beans making up the larder. Mudd, the radio operator, admitted to having had some cooking experience and was promptly appointed as chef.

Captain John Douglas took over the wheel shortly after midnight. With the boat moving slowly and easily under his hand, he relaxed in his seat and puffed meditatively at a cigarette while watching the full moon and myriad stars reflected in the calm waters of the Pacific.

Despite the peril of their position, he found himself humming under his breath. After the long months of confinement under the yellow-bellies, it was worth danger to be free of surveillance. Temporarily, this was freedom; the next hour might bring a violent storm to capsize the frail vessel. Or an enemy patrol might spot them and return them all to possible execution.

But, on the other hand, their steady — although slow! — progress could bring them to some uninvaded island, where friendly natives would care for them; where some day an Allied boat or plane would find them and restore them to civilization. You had your choice to dream about; and it was much more pleasant to—

"Hello."

THE low-pitched feminine voice brought him back to reality. He blinked a little at sight of the girl standing beside him, the skirt of her evening gown trailing from beneath the heavy jacket she was wearing. A fragile scarf to match her dress was bound loosely about the wealth of red-gold hair of her head.

"Good evening, Miss Purwin," he said gently.

"I wanted a cigarette," she confessed, moving nearer to drop into the seat beside him.

"Of course." He dug into a pocket of his sea-coat and brought out a package of Camels. "American made," he said, offering the pack. "Help yourself."

She accepted a light, and for a few moments there was silence. Finally she asked, "Have you any idea where we are, Captain?"

"Only in a vague way," Douglas admitted. "Somewhere west of Australia and south of Java, I suppose."

"Do you think we'll come through this?"

The officer shrugged. "Perhaps. If good weather holds out. There's always the possibility that we'll reach an island or be picked up. Too bad the boat's radio has been dismantled, or we'd send out an SOS."

Elaine watched the tall, handsome officer as he spoke. Actually, she reflected, he wasn't truly handsome; his face was a little too rugged, his features too uneven for that. He didn't smile often enough, and there was a sort of grim sternness about his jaw that led her to believe that he took himself too seriously.

He said, "What's your home town?" absently, as though his mind were on something else entirely.

"Chicago."

"Been away long?"

"Two years."

"Been in the Dutch Indies all that time?"

"No."

Mighty close-mouthed, thought Douglas. Probably had something to hide. Probably it tied in with this business of sharing a meal with a Jap bigshot at day-break. He felt an urge to

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prod her into something other than monosyllables.

"Married?" he asked, eyes still on the sea ahead.

She turned her head quickly to look at him through the darkness. "Certainly not!"

"Hmmm." He didn't sound particularly interested.

She was silent for several minutes. Then she dropped her cigarette over the railing and turned to him.

"You don't think very highly of me, do you, Captain Douglas?" she asked quietly.

The officer tugged at the wheel to keep the craft's nose into the wind. He said, irrelevantly, "I never could figure out what you were doing in that dress at five a. m., and splitting drinks with a lousy skibbie."

An angry retort trembled on Elaine's lips. She waited until it had faded; then she said, sweetly, coldly:

"Why I was wearing that dress, and why I was there, is entirely my affair, Captain. And he was not 'a lousy skibbie,' but a Japanese officer and a gentleman. He—"

It was then that John Douglas turned on her. Despite the darkness, she could see the lines of his rage-twisted features. "Shut up!" he said, very low. "'Japanese gentleman,' hell! You spend one day—one *hour!*—in the black hole that I and my men escaped from, take *one* blow from the whips that gave us hundreds, eat *one* mouthful of the kind of slop we *lived* on for months—then come and tell me about 'a Japanese gentleman'!

"Let me warn you, *Miss* Purwin: repeat that phrase where Gregg or Bouchaix, or even that nice gentle guy, Lanceford Mudd, can hear it—and you'll be torn apart!"

There was a moment of strained silence. The girl shivered suddenly, turned, and without a word, rose and went below.

And for a long time after she was gone, Captain John Douglas stared thoughtfully out across the night-shrouded Pacific.

FOUR days had passed. The scarred PT boat still limped wearily across a world of water. The improvised sail fluttered fitfully under the touch of a vapid wind, no more than enough to keep the tiny craft in motion.

Sprawled under a rude shelter of planks, made necessary by the broiling sun, Bouchaix, Mudd and Joe Gregg argued and talked and played mumblepeg with Gregg's monster jack-knife. Apart from them, Elaine Purwin nodded, half-asleep.

Captain Douglas, at the wheel, lit a cigarette and ruefully counted the four still left in the crumpled pack. It was fortunate, he reflected, that of the five persons on board, only he and Joe Gregg were habitual smokers. Otherwise, the supply would long since have been exhausted.

He really shouldn't smoke. The weed served to dry his throat, increasing his thirst. The dwindling supply of water had been rationed from the first, and its use must be cut still further if they were to survive many more days.

Food had not yet become a problem. None of the passengers possessed much of an appetite and Mudd's duties as chef were light.

But Douglas had taken on a fresh worry an hour before. Heavy clouds had begun to pile up on the northern horizon at that time, and they were beginning to move steadily southward. Douglas was perfectly aware that a storm of even light proportions would swamp their craft and drown them all.

He sat there, gripping the wheel, his

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eyes gloomily watching the spreading cancer of clouds. A chill breeze, damp with the threat of rain, touched his cheek . . . and endured.

Douglas made his decision. "Joe," he called. "Joe Gregg."

The soldier, his face dark with sprouting beard, looked up from a desultory discussion with his two companions. "Yeah, Cap?"

"Come here a minute."

GREGG rose and came forward, mounting the short flight of steps to the cock-pit, a puzzled scowl on his rough-hewn features. He accepted a cigarette and a match.

The captain watched him set fire to the tobacco, then said, "Looks like we're in for it, Joe."

"You mean weather?"

"Yes."

"Think we can stick out a storm, Cap?"

Douglas shrugged. "Might," he said shortly.

Gregg grunted. "And might not," he finished.

"We'll do what we can," Douglas told him. "Round up anything that can be used to bail with. And dig me up a good-sized length of rope."

"What for?" Gregg asked, surprised.

"You don't think I'd be able to keep my seat here in a heavy sea, do you? I'll have to tie myself behind the wheel."

"That could be a sure way to suicide," Gregg observed. "If the boat flounders, you won't have a chance to swim for it."

"Where would I swim to?"

The other nodded. "Yeah. There's something to that."

By the time Douglas was tightly lashed to the cock-pit rail and the others had been assigned to stations, the sky was almost entirely overcast. The wind had swelled nearly to a gale, driving the frail, wounded craft through the long swells at increased speed. Now and then, combers broke across the prow, drenching the crew with spray.

From her huddled position in the lee of the shelter, Elaine Purwin watched John Douglas fight the rudder to keep the boat's nose running with the sea. She could see the muscles of his shoulders and arms bunch under the strain of his exertions, and she felt a grudging admiration for his physical prowess.

Bouchaix and Gregg, at Douglas' shouted order, ran to reef the flapping sail, and the boat lost some of its speed. But the waves were steadily increasing in size, looming high above them as they slid into each mammoth trough, threatening momentarily to engulf them.

But the silently cursing man at the wheel held the bow pointed true, and each time the little ship fought its way gallantly upward to the watery crest.

And then the rain came—a choking, blinding, almost solid deluge of icy water that seemed a giant hand pressing the fifty ton boat under the sea.

In spite of its wounds, the gallant craft fought back. The inexperienced crew bailed frantically at the ankle-deep water swirling into the shallow hold.

An hour went by. Douglas disregarded the agony of blistered hands as he fought to hold the sea-battered rudder. Through the growing darkness he vainly sought for evidence that the storm had reached its peak.

He caught occasional glimpses of Bouchaix, Gregg and Mudd at the bailing vessels. Even the girl, her ludicrous evening gown hidden under oil-skins, was wielding a tin dishpan as though her life depended upon it. Which, he

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told himself grimly, was certainly no exaggeration!

AND then he heard it—a sound like distant thunder. At first, he was not sure; but as the moments passed and the dull, rolling echoes increased in volume, he knew.

"Gregg!" he yelled. "Joe!"

The harassed soldier looked up. "Yeah, Cap?"

The wind seemed to slacken momentarily, as though gathering strength for a final onslaught, and Douglas' voice was suddenly clear and loud.

"Land ahead!" he screamed. "Listen! You can hear the breakers!"

They heard it, then; a harsh, booming roar from dead ahead. Bouchaix threw back his head and, in sheer relief, howled like a wolf, while Elaine Purwin sank to her knees and burst into sobs.

"Get busy!" Douglas shouted. "We're not out of this yet. Keep bail—"

The sentence was never finished. There was a sudden, grinding impact against a hidden barrier, the crunching sound of tearing metal and rending wood, and an immense wall of water rose like the overhanging craig of a mountain and toppled upon them.

John Douglas knew a flashing moment of acute agony across his chest, the sharp, brittle sound of snapping wood reached his ears—and the darkness engulfed him.

CHAPTER IV

Castaways

AT THE moment of impact, Drexel Bouchaix was near the boat's edge. He had just stooped to retrieve his bailing vessel when the ship's forward motion was so abruptly halted.

As a result, he shot head foremost across the low railing, cleaving the water like a diver from a springboard. Bobbing to the surface, he spat out what, to him, seemed a full gallon of salt-bitter sea water, and instinctively struck out toward the booming sound of surf almost directly ahead.

And then the swirling waters caught him like an enveloping hand and, choking and gasping, he was lifted high and flung forward. There followed a breathless sensation of falling from a great height, and he crashed belly-flat against a hard, unyielding surface.

The tremendous impact sent the breath from his lungs; and it was blind self-preservation alone that brought him to his feet and sent him stumbling forward far enough to escape the tug of the retreating wave that had flung him there.

His last few ounces of strength gone, he collapsed in a sodden heap, scant inches from the angry reach of the mountainous waves.

How long he lay there, fighting for breath, Drexel Bouchaix had no way of knowing. Gradually the spasmodic twitching of muscles ceased and a feeling of lassitude began to invade his mind, weighing heavily against his eyes. He was at the point of drifting into an exhausted sleep when an insistent voice within his mind made itself heard.

"What about the rest?" it clamored. "Captain Douglas and Joe and the skinny guy, Mudd? Maybe they—"

The former mechanic staggered back to his feet. For a minute or two he stood there, staring into the blackness, foam from the giant combers pulling at his shoes. But the overcast skies were empty of the tiniest pin-point of light, and the rain, slackened now to a heavy drizzle, helped to keep visibility at zero.

He began to run lumberingly along the beach, weakly calling the names of

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the others. After some fifty yards, his foot struck heavily against a yielding object, sending him to his knees.

His shaking fingers tugged at the collar of a seacoat, pulling it away from a bearded face which he recognized as that of Joe Gregg.

Frantically he fought to drag the inert body higher onto the sands and away from the chill waters. This done, he clawed open the heavy coat and pressed his ear to the chest of the silent figure. To his relief he could make out the steady beat of Gregg's heart.

LEAVING the side of the unconscious man, Bouchaix went back on rubber legs to search for other possible survivors. It was nearly an hour later that he found a second; an hour in which the desire to abandon the search and give in to his flagged body's demand for rest was almost overpowering.

This time he had little trouble in transporting the unconscious victim to higher ground. He did so roughly, dropping the frail body to the ground, not waiting to learn if life were gone. The cynical thought came that even the hungry Pacific had refused the body of Elaine Purwin.

He had no more than reached the shoreline again when he heard the sounds of moving feet in the sand and a half-running figure stumbled against him.

"Who is—" Bouchaix began weakly, then gasped as strong arms went round him in a giant bear-hug.

"By God! Bouchaix! It's me—Douglas!" The captain's voice was strong with relief. "At least, they're two of us!"

Tears of relief came to the machinist's eyes. "Four of us," he corrected. He collapsed into a sitting position in the wet sand. "Jeez, Captain, I'm glad I found you. I'm about done up."

Douglas dropped down beside him. "So am I," he admitted. "When we hit that rock, or reef, I thought it was curtains for all of us. That sudden stop knocked me clean through the railing, ropes and all. I didn't even have to swim; a wave tucked me under one arm and tore out for land like the devil was trying to take me away from it! After I got back my breath, I started out to see if anyone else came though. . . . You said there were four of us. Who's missing?"

"Mudd."

There was a long moment of silence. Then Douglas said, "In other words, the girl came through?" His voice was curiously flat.

"Yes," replied Bouchaix, without enthusiasm. "At least her body did. She was out cold when I found her. I didn't waste time trying to bring her around."

Douglas said slowly, "You know, Bouchaix, maybe we're too hard on that girl."

The other shrugged. "Maybe. We've tried to look after her, if nothing else. Considering where she was when we found her, I think we've been pretty decent."

John Douglas winced a little as he recalled his conversation with Elaine in the cock-pit four nights before. No wonder she had studiously avoided him ever since! He sighed heavily and rose to his feet.

"We'll have to gather up the other two and make some kind of camp," he said. "I'll try to get a fire going so we can dry out our clothing. Lucky the rain's about stopped."

Bouchaix stood up slowly, gritting his teeth against the complaint of aching muscles. "What," he asked, "are you going to use for matches? For the fire, I mean."

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"That's one thing I *have* got!" the captain said, grinning. "That is, if the waterproof pouch they're in has lived up to its name."

THEY found Gregg sitting up, hunched against the lessening drizzle. Beyond a raging headache as an aftermath of the blow that had knocked him senseless, he was comparatively fit.

But Elaine Purwin still lay exactly as Bouchaix had left her. Captain Douglas knelt and took one of her limp hands, his strong fingers searching for a pulse. At the presence of a steady, strong throb under his touch, he was aware of a sharp, unaccountable sensation of relief.

"She's alive!" he exclaimed, looking up at the dull blobs of white that were the faces of his two companions.

"So what?" Grebb mumbled.

A sharp retort rose to the officer's lips but he remained silent. After all, he couldn't really blame the gunner for his viewpoint. It had been others like this girl who had paved the way for the Pearl Harbor debacle. He steeled his heart against the unworthy weakness of pity and lifted the slight body from the damp earth.

"Anyway," he said, his voice matter-of-fact, "I wouldn't let a dog lie here to die."

The three walked slowly inland, feeling their way across a gently rolling plain until Douglas called a halt near a thick growth of shrubs. He said, "These come closer to being firewood than anything we've hit on yet. While you two collect something dry enough to burn, I'll clear a space where there's some degree of shelter."

A half hour later, the three men were grouped about a blazing fire to the windward of the clump of shrubs. Douglas had placed the still unconscious girl as close to the flames as was possible and was chaffing her wrists gently in an effort to revive her, while Bouchaix and Gregg silently watched.

Finally Elaine stirred, and a deep sigh escaped her lips. Douglas released her hands, then, and squatted back on his heels, studying the wan, lovely face, his expression inscrutable. A sea-coat, wrung free of water and hastily dried by the fire, covered the fragile evening gown from breasts to knees. For some reason, the sea had failed to snatch the purple scarf from the shoulder length strands of her hair. She looked helpless and pathetically weak as she lay there, and Douglas turned his head abruptly to combat the appealing picture she made.

Presently she opened her eyes. At first there was no expression in them as she saw the bearded, impassive faces, shadowy and gaunt against the flickering flames. Then she moved as though to sit up, and John Douglas leaned forward to help her do so.

Her eyes went slowly over the circle of men, seeing the open hostility of Gregg and the complete disinterest of Bouchaix. She said, "Where are we?" quietly, and was aware of how weak her voice sounded.

"We don't know," Douglas said in reply to her question. "Probably on some island. How big, or whether it's inhabited, we haven't found out yet."

She glanced at their expressionless faces again. "Where is Mr. Mudd?"

NO ONE made answer to that, and at once she knew. Of them all, he had been most courteous to her—more human, less inclined to pass judgment. Tears stung her eyes and she turned her head away that the others might not see.

The rain, no more than a fine mist for the past hour, ceased altogether and

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the overcast sky began slowly to clear. An occasional star gleamed softly against the curtain of night.

She must have dozed, then, for when she next opened her eyes there was only a lone figure seated before the fire. It was Captain Douglas, poking thoughtfully at the embers with a short length of shrub. She guessed that the others were sleeping nearby, while the captain watched.

She rolled to her other side to relieve muscles stiff from contact with the hard ground under her sea-coat. Her back was now to the man at the fire, and a few feet in front of her were the beginnings of the thick grove of tree-like shrubbery. The flickering flames illuminated the edge of the grove and she lay quiet, dreamily watching the wavering shadows. . . .

"Aieeeee!"

John Douglas, half asleep at the fire, bounded to his feet in sudden panic as the scream tore at his ears. For a second he was unable to determine from whence the nerve-wracking sound had come; but as Elaine Purwin sprang to her feet and threw herself into his arms with terror-stricken abandon, he realized that it had been she who had cried out.

With clumsy fingers he patted the head buried against his shoulder. "Take it easy, girl," he admonished. "You're all right. Nothing's going to hurt you."

Bouchaix and Gregg, aroused by the scream, came into the circle of firelight. Douglas caught a glimpse of the latter's sardonic expression, and pushed the girl away, his face flaming.

"What's the matter with you?" Douglas demanded gruffly. "Why the yell? Have a bad dream, maybe?"

Slowly Elaine's control was coming back. She bit her lips in an effort to stop their trembling.

"No," she managed to say at last. "No, I wasn't dreaming. I was wide awake. I saw him. I saw him I tell you!"

"'Saw him'?" repeated Douglas, dazed. "Who? Where?"

"It was a man—a man on a horse. He was wearing a—a tunic; I guess you would call it that. There was something like a cape hanging from his shoulders, and there was a helmet on his head!"

"Are you kiddin'?" growled Joe Gregg incredulously. "No one on a horse could get within a hundred feet of us without being heard."

"I saw him," insisted the girl doggedly. She pointed a trembling finger at the wall of shrubbery a few feet away. "The horse came out from between two of those little trees. I could see the man on its back as clearly as I see you now. When I—I screamed, he whirled the horse about and disappeared among the trees."

Douglas regarded her with a mixture of scorn and pity. "Now *wait* a minute, Miss Purwin. Can't you see how silly you're being? In the first place, those *trees,* as you call them, are less than a foot apart and not over five feet tall. How, then, could a man on a horse ride *between* them? Not only that, but—"

"Don't you understand what I'm trying to tell you?" Elaine Purwin demanded, her voice rising hysterically. "They were both tiny—*the man was no more than six inches tall!*"

THE brief interval of shocked amazement that followed was rudely broken by Joe Gregg.

"Well, for God's sake!" he groaned. "Of all the nutty yarns I ever heard, that takes the bacon. Go on back to sleep, Dizzy—and another yelp outa you and I'll slap—"

"Gregg!" snapped Douglas.

The burly gunner turned to him,

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hands spread appealingly. "But, damn it, Cap; this slap-happy dame wakes us—"

"I think," Douglas said stonily, "that you owe Miss Purwin an apology."

"Apology—hell! She—"

"You heard me."

Gregg's glowering eyes fell under the chill menace in those of Captain John Douglas.

"It isn't necessary, Captain Douglas," Elaine said coldly. "It's not important."

Douglas ignored her, his eyes on Gregg. "I'm waiting, soldier."

"All . . . *right*. I apologize. Good *night!*" And without a backward glance, Joe Gregg stalked back to his sea-coat couch.

Douglas turned to the girl. "That will do for tonight, Miss Purwin," he said coldly. "If you have any more dreams, please keep them to yourself."

ELAINE awakened to the gray drabness of a foggy dawn. The fire had died completely, and the tattered figure of Captain Douglas had disappeared. Either he was sleeping or had gone off somewhere to reconnoiter. She could make out the huddled bodies of Joe Gregg and Drexel Bouchaix where they slept under their heavy coats.

She arose, shivering as the damp of the fog touched her thinly clad shoulders, and slipped into Douglas' coat, which had served as her blanket. For want of something better to do, she stirred up the bed of last night's fire, managing to uncover a few live embers. These she nursed to flame by adding tiny branches from the heap of shrubs the captain had gathered the previous night.

By the time Bouchaix and Gregg awakened, she had a strong fire roaring away.

Gregg, his thick stubble of beard giving him a sullen, brutish appearance, came to the fire and warmed himself. His small, piggish eyes watched the girl with unblinking dislike.

Bouchaix joined him presently, his blond hair awry, eyes heavy with sleep. He looked around, said, "Where's the captain?" shortly.

Gregg shrugged. "I dunno. You seen him, babe?"

Elaine met his eyes calmly, still rankling over his words of the night before. "No. And don't call me 'babe'."

The gunner's face darkened with instant rage. "Don't get upstage with me, tutz! Any doll that'll warm up to a damn Jap is lucky I even talk to her. Get me?"

The color left Elaine's cheeks, and her nostrils pinched in angrily. "You foul-mouthed hoodlum!" she snapped. "If I were a man I'd knock some respect into your ugly head!"

With a single light, pantherish step, Gregg was beside her, a hand gripping her wrist. "Another word outa you," he snarled, "and I'll slap your teeth in! Understand?"

Elaine, fear and revulsion in her expression, fought to break his hold, but the thick fingers only increased their pressure.

Bouchaix said slowly, "Easy, Joe. The captain won't like—"

"Joe! Bouchaix! Hey, boys! Come here—quick!"

They heard Douglas' shouted words coming from beyond the ridge between them and the sea. With a startled oath Gregg dropped the girl's arm, and the two men ran quickly in that direction.

When they were gone, Elaine Purwin sank to her knees beside the fire and burst into tears of mingled fear and humiliation. From the first she had wanted to tell them the truth, that her enforced stay with them might be more

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endurable. But their quickness to believe the worst of her, their thinly veiled dislike and contempt, struck hard at her pride, steeling her against making any peace overtures that might be construed as cowardice. By this time, they would not even believe her story, she told herself bitterly.

THE fog had gone and the sun was clear of the eastern horizon when Bouchaix and Gregg returned to camp. They were weighted down with a miscellany of objects: tins of food, pots and pans, water-soaked wearing apparel.

Bouchaix, whose high spirits were reflected in a wide grin, caught the girl's astonished expression and burst into a loud laugh.

"Right out of a department store!" he shouted. "Make up a breakfast of beans and biscuits, lady. We eat!"

He dumped the load into a heap at her feet, while Gregg piled his own burden beside the fire and hurried back over the ridge.

Elaine, her forgotten hunger returning a thousand-fold at sight of the cans of food, knelt to select several of the containers. "Where did it all come from?" she gasped.

"From the boat! The waves must have torn it loose from that reef. Anyway, the captain found her, high and dry on the beach not far from here."

He lowered his voice, and looked furtively about. "And look, Miss Purwin. Stay away from Joe. He hates you. Does a lot of talking and name calling. There's bound to be trouble between him and Douglas if he keeps it up. The captain will side with you because you're a woman, but there's no sense in dividing the camp. I'm not trying to—"

She interrupted him. "I understand perfectly, Mr. Bouchaix. You needn't say anything more about it. And . . . thank you."

The arrival of the others stopped it there. Elaine opened the cans, and soon the exciting odor of food hung over the little camp.

Over his food, Douglas made plans aloud. "We'll rig up some kind of a shelter out of planks from the boat. Plywood isn't the easiest stuff in the world to work with, but we've got one hammer and plenty of nails, so it should be possible to do. It shouldn't take more than a couple of days; then, with this spot as a base, we'll set out to explore this island—or whatever it is."

"Any idea where we're at, Cap?" Gregg asked around a mouthful of beans and biscuit.

"Hard to say. We've traveled mostly south since leaving the Java coast. The storm drove us south-east, away from Australia. How far, I don't know."

Bouchaix said, "You know, the little of this place we've seen so far makes me wonder."

"What do you mean?" Douglas asked.

"Well, for one thing, the vegetation. Every thing along that line is . . . well, stunted. Nearest thing to a tree are these patches of shrubs. And the plain, here, is covered with grass that looks like it'd been cut with a lawnmower."

Douglas nodded slowly. "I've noticed that, too. I was examining one of the shrubs we used for firewood last night. Actually they're not shrubs at all—at least, not shrubs like I've ever come across."

"Meaning what?" Gregg asked.

"I mean they're miniature *trees*—bole, branches and leaves!"

Gregg broke out with a sudden guffaw. "Swell!" he roared. "The little people like the one the dame seen last night can play Tarzan in them kinda trees!"

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ELAINE, sitting a little apart from the others, felt her face grow warm, but she did not raise her eyes from the tin plate she was holding.

Neither of the other two men laughed with Gregg. When the gunner had sobered enough to resume eating, Douglas said casually:

"Since Miss Purwin is one of us, and an American girl, she is entitled to our respect. Keep that in mind, Gregg."

The gunner's head jerked back as though he had been struck. With a single, savage movement, he slammed his plate to the ground and bounded to his feet.

"Okay, Cap," he said tightly. "You've had your little say; now I'll have mine. Before the Japs got us you outranked me and I had to take whatever you felt like handin' out. Things are different now. We're just a bunch of guys on our own and this 'Captain and Private' stuff don't go. I'm tellin' you, *Douglas,* it don't go! If you feel like bowin' and scrapin' to this here Jap-lovin' tart, that's your business. But don't get no ideas—"

Douglas, who had been quietly eating, eyes on his plate, while Gregg's rage mounted, put down his dish and got to his feet to face the suddenly silent gunner.

He said, "All right, sweetheart, *you* listen to *me!* I'm sick and tired of your grousing and general bad manners. As far as I'm concerned—and as far as *you're* concerned—it's *Captain* Douglas, and just to make sure you don't forget it, I'm going to knock a little knowledge into your thick skull!"

Bouchaix, next to Elaine, bent forward and whispered rapid words into her ear.

"I'll try to stop them," he told her. "You get away from here for awhile. Go take a walk for an hour or so; then come back. Go on; get moving!"

Elaine rose and slipped away as Bouchaix lumbered to his feet and stepped between the two hard-eyed men. She heard him say, "Look, there's no sense in you two getting all worked—" And then she was out of ear-shot.

For an hour she walked slowly inland, heading southward. The countryside she found to be gently rolling; there were no hills worthy of the name, and, other than the fairly numerous groves of miniature trees and the closely cropped grass underfoot, no vegetation.

It was shortly after she reached the summit of a low hill that she found the first evidence that the land was inhabited.

At first glance, it appeared to be a pathway. It skirted the edge of the slope's crest, following the top of the hill in a broad, sweeping bend to disappear into a valley beyond.

But was it actually a path? Elaine knelt and ran her hand gingerly across a section of the shiny, glass-like material, deep blue in color. It was no more than eight inches in width—certainly, she decided, too narrow for human feet—and appeared to have been laid in a solid strip, like asphalt, for she could see no evidence of cracks to denote sections. The perfect dimensions served as evidence that it was man-made and not some natural phenomenon.

And then she remembered the little man among the trees, during the night, and the tiny size of the trail was explained.

"And they almost had me believing that I *was* dreaming!" she murmured. "Wait until they see this."

She debated over returning immediately to acquaint the others of her find. But curiosity won over prudence, and she started off into the southwest, using the glass-like path as a guide to her progress.

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FOR the better part of another hour she moved steadily ahead. Walking, because of the almost level nature of the countryside and the closely clipped grassland underfoot, required no more effort than traversing some well-tended city park.

It was the steadily increasing heat from the sun in the cloudless sky that finally tired her, and she suddenly realized that she was not altogether recovered from the strain of the past several days. Her feet, in the thin-soled, open-toed shoes, were beginning to ache.

And so she sought out the shelter of a grove of the tiny trees a few feet from the rock pathway. Here she found a small spring, and she drank deeply of the cool water.

It was restful to sit there, protected somewhat from the sun's heat by the tree-like shrubs. The thin carpeting of grass was inviting, and she stretched out on her side, one cheek pillowed on a bare forearm. She wondered sleepily if the grass might not stain her dress, then laughed a little when she remembered how it had been submerged in sea water and exposed to countless other hardships—and fell sound asleep.

CHAPTER V

Hostage

PRINCE XERBUS, heir apparent of the Royal House of Gue, hereditary rulers of Lilliput, reined in his mount at the crest of a high hill. He reached up to push the heavy helmet away from his forehead, then turned to Marsi Frelock, his attendant and friend, who, astride a brown-coated horse, had pulled up beside him.

Xerbus mopped perspiration from his high, well-shaped brow with the sleeve of his jerkin and glanced about the broad plains below, his brown eyes flashing with pleasure.

"I tell you, Marsi," he said, in his deep, rich voice, "our scientists have done us no favor in taking away our simple pleasures by their discoveries. Where is the satisfaction in shooting about Lilliput in a *bilmo* at 500 blustrugs an hour. You can't even *see* the beauty of your country at that speed."

Frelock shrugged his thick shoulders sulkily. "Who wants to see nothing but hills and trees, anyway?" he muttered. "We could have made this trip quickly and in comfort if you had listened to me. But no—you had to travel all these blustrugs just to see hill and trees!"

Xerbus' strong lips narrowed in half-amused anger and his ruggedly handsome face darkened a little. "I've told you," he said, "that we'd miss what we're looking for if we traveled by air. If the Blefuscuians have entered Lilliput in this vicinity, they'd establish their camps among the trees and out of sight of any of our bilmos. Our only chance of discovering their presence is by covering the ground on horseback."

Frelock grunted. "The whole idea is nonsense if you ask me. The people of Blefuscu have not dared lift their heads to us since Lilliput conquered their country long before you and I were born. We're on a fool's errand and you should have sense enough to know it!"

A hot retort trembled on Xerbus' lips but he remained silent. Too well he knew that Marsi Frelock was impervious to attempts to silence him. At times like this Xerbus wondered if he were cut out to be a king. He had none of his august father's imperial savagery in dealing with anyone, no matter whom, who dared be anything but humble and fawning in his presence. If Golbasto Gue's own son were

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to answer the monarch as Marsi had answered *him,* he would be publicly whipped.

He shook off his thoughts. "Let's go on," he suggested. "We shall have to keep moving if we expect to reach the Great Water before darkness."

They cantered along the eight foot width of the *Misdite* highway into the northeast, the metal shoes of their horses striking occasional sparks from the glass-like surface.

IT WAS Xerbus who finally broke the silence. "When the time comes," he said thoughtfully, "that I am king of Lilliput, I shall see to it that a silly superstition is done away with and this rich farmland is put to use once more. In this part of Lilliput is some of the richest soil we possess. It is criminal to let it go to waste."

Marsi Frelock shook his head. "It will be one thing to issue an edict ending the Law; another to have the peasants observe it. It was near here, you know, that the *Quinbus Flestrin* * was captured over four hundred and eighty wokas ** ago. It is said that other giants may come if any Lilliputian so much sets foot in this part of our country."

"Stupid superstition!" Xerbus snorted.

"Of course. But try to tell the peasants that. The old folk-tales persist, telling how the Quinbus Flestrin ate great numbers of live stock at a single meal. Had he not left our country, all Lilliput would have been faced by famine. They will not risk bringing another giant to visit us. May Orid, our god, help us if it should become known that we have broken the Law. Even His Highness, your father, might not be able to save us from execution!"

Their horses slowed to a walk as they started the gradual ascent to the crest of great hill. At the top, they dismounted to water their steeds at the headwaters of a river.

After resting briefly, the two men swung into their saddles once more. The road led through heavy forest for several blustrugs, then came out into open ground that permitted a sweeping view of the valley below.

And then Xerbus' hand shot out to close strong fingers about his companion's wrist.

"By the helmet of Orid!" he said in an awed whisper. "Marsi, look yonder! By that clump of trees."

Frelock turned his head to follow Xerbus' pointing finger, then shrank back, his heavy, shapeless features suddenly white.

"This I do not believe!" he muttered. "It is a trick of shadows. Else the ancient curse is fulfilled; we have walked on forbidden ground—"

"Silence, fool!" Xerbus snarled. It was just such a thought that had sent an icy finger along his own back.

FROM where they were, a blustrug distant, a thick grove of trees stood near the highway. Projecting into view from behind those trees was the huge outlines of a human foot, incased in a sandal of peculiar design.

"We must make sure," Xerbus said, his voice unsteady. "It may be the foot of some mammoth image, fashioned by the Ancients to mark the spot where the Quinbus Flestrin was found so long ago."

They spurred their mounts into motion and went thundering down the road toward the trees.

As he rode, Xerbus kept his eyes riveted on the gigantic foot. As the

* Quinbus Flestrin—literally, Man Mountain.

** Woka—roughly the equivalent of six months of our own time.—Ed.

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moments passed and the monstrous object loomed ever larger, his belief that it was the foot of some tremendous statue became almost a certainty.

While they were still several hundred feet distant, Xerbus ordered a halt. "We had better go the rest of the way on foot," he cautioned. The Man Mountain—if such it be—might hear the hoofs of our horses and be warned."

They swung from the saddles, leaving the horses to stand untethered, and moved warily forward.

"If it proves to be another giant," muttered Frelock, "what shall we do?"

"Notify Bogolresh at once," Xerbus replied unhesitatingly. "It was for just such an emergency as this that our scientists prepared almost two hundred wokas ago."

They came to a halt only a few feet away from the great foot. It loomed high above them, the toe fully nine feet from the ground. Other details were visible now: the ankle beyond the foot and the curve of the calf beyond that. The ankle must have measured seven feet in circumference and was covered with a network of cords woven into a systematic pattern that had broken in several places, leaving holes.

Then the two men of Lilliput, prince and commoner, passed the fringe of trees and stepped cautiously into the open—and into full sight of the sleeping figure of a woman sixty-five feet in length!

"Quinlom Flestrin!"

"A Woman Mountain!" echoed Frelock numbly. He watched, fascinated, as the twin-peaked chest rose and fell, and the sound of her breathing was like the rush of wind through leaves.

"She is sleeping," Xerbus whispered. "Thank Orid, she was discovered before she reached Mildendo. The very sight of her would have sent a wave of panic through the entire population."

"What do we do, now?" Frelock demanded hoarsely.

"Send for Bogolresh," Xerbus replied. "If he hurries, it is possible he can arrive before the Quinlom Flestrin awakens."

HE FUMBLED with the fastenings of his jerkin, and finally withdrew a small black metal box not much larger than his hand. Set in one side of its surface was a small microphone with a series of buttons in a row beneath.

He depressed one of the buttons and spoke rapidly into the speaker. "Central Control. Beam at 12-20. Answer."

A slight pause. Then a tiny, metallic voice came from the microphone. "Central Control."

"This is Prince Xerbus," said the young man. "Put me in contact with *Hurgo* * Bogolresh. Quickly! It is of the utmost importance!"

"At once!" promised the thin thread of voice from the box.

Xerbus, one eye watching the even rise and fall of the great chest of the Woman Mountain, waited impatiently for his connection. Beside him, Marsi Frelock clenched and unclenched his strong hands in nervous anxiety.

A new voice came suddenly from the tiny speaker. "Bogolresh, Your Majesty." It sounded impatient, irritated. "I'm in the middle of testing that new power source for bilmo fuel and I—"

"Quiet!" thundered Xerbus, angrily. "Lilliput is in peril and you babble about bilmo power!"

There was a moment of shocked incredulity at the other end of the microphone. Then Bogolresh's voice came through, subdued and apologetic. "I await Your Majesty's orders."

* Hurgo—Lilliputian term corresponding to our word "Lord."—Ed.

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Xerbus took a deep breath. He could visualize the affect his next words would have on the testy, middle-aged scientist, and unconsciously he smiled.

"The Quinbus Flestrin has returned!"

"What!"

"Yes. I should say *Quinlom* Flestrin. A Woman Mountain."

Bogolresh wasted no more time in astonishment. "Where is she?"

"About two hundred blustrugs from Mildendo, on the Great Water road. A short distance beyond the source of the Monaldo river."

A note of alarm deepened in Bogolresh's voice. "But Excellency, it is forbidden to enter that part of Lilliput. The Law says—"

"I know what the Law says," snapped Xerbus. "Meanwhile, Lilliput faces her greatest danger in almost five hundred wokas and you prattle about outdated rules. Can you find your way with the directions I have furnished?"

"I believe so," said the other. "I will leave at once with several of my assistants. A fast bilmo should make the trip in about half an hour."

"Then hurry," Xerbus urged. "The Woman Mountain is asleep and may not awaken before you arrive. How much time will you need to get the necessary equipment together?"

"It has been kept in readiness for almost two hundred wokas," said the scientist. "Your own ancestor, Golbasto Gue VIII, passed that Law."

"Then hurry!" Xerbus repeated, and pressed a button on the communicator, breaking the connection.

He restored the small instrument to its special pocket beneath his jerkin, settled the golden helmet on his black hair and turned to his companion.

"While we wait," he suggested, "let us examine our find."

"It is not wise," Frelock protested. "If she were to awaken, it might cost us both our lives."

Xerbus stared at him. "Is this the brave Marsi Frelock I hear? The man who has so often assured me he fears nothing that walks or flies or swims?"

Frelock spread his hands. "Of such as this I am afraid," he confessed. "A single movement of one three foot finger and we should be crushed."

"Then we shall avoid those fingers," Xerbus said. "Come."

THE woman still slept on her side, the mountainous head cushioned on a naked forearm. The two Lilliputians circled to a point where her back was to them and began cautious progress toward her feet.

The flowing skirt of the purple evening gown had pushed up during her sleep until the vast expanse of her knees was visible. Xerbus, with a degree of bravery which Frelock had never suspected of him, stepped into the pool of cloth and began to inch his way toward the softly curved bulk of her thigh.

"Orid help you if she rolls to her back," Frelock called softly from a safe distance. "You'd be crushed to pulp!"

Xerbus ignored the warning. Working his way slowly forward until he could go no farther without coming into actual contact with the Woman Mountain's body, he stopped his advance. For a few minutes he stood there amid yards of coarse cloth, his amazed eyes studying the enormous contours of the sleeping giantess. Finally he turned and retraced his steps.

"She sleeps as though completely exhausted," he reported when he had rejoined his companion. "It is possible that she will not awaken before Bogolresh arrives. And much depends upon that."

They walked slowly back to their

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horses, remounted and rode in a wide circle toward the girl's head.

"How ugly she is!" whispered Marsi Frelock, as they reined in their mounts while still forty feet away. "Observe the size of her nose. Easily a foot and a half in length! And her mouth! Two feet if an inch! I'll wager her teeth are nearly half a foot long. She'd make two bites of each of us, Xerbus!"

The young prince shook his head. "She may not really be ugly, Marsi. It is only her hugeness that makes her seem so to us. Were she our own size she might appear as lovely as any woman of the Court.

"As for eating us . . . have you forgotten the legends of Goliber. The account says he was a gentle giant, kind and courteous to our people. Perhaps it is not proper that we should treat this Woman Mountain as the Law requires. It will be an awful thing to—"

. . . Elaine, sleeping soundly on the hard earth, turned in her sleep, rolling slowly to her back. . . .

As the monstrous, sixty-five foot body went into motion, the two horses reared, pawed the air, and bolted across the field in the opposite direction, their riders sawing impotently on the reins in a frantic effort to regain control. By the time Xerbus and his friend had managed to pull them to a halt, they were fully a blustrug distant from the Woman Mountain.

When the horses had quieted, Xerbus turned his mount toward the distant giantess and applied the spurs, but his steed balked and would not obey.

"You see," Marsi remarked. "Brotel is a smart horse. Smarter, even, than you and I. He feels that the Quinlom Flestrin is much nicer to look at from a blustrug away!"

In answer, Xerbus spurred the horse angrily; but Brotel reared high, forefeet pawing the air, neighed shrilly and refused to move.

The prince gave in with bad grace. "I should leave you here," he growled to Marsi Frelock, "to hold the horses while I go back on foot. But it is almost the time that Bogolresh and his men are due; we will ride back along the trail a few blustrugs and await them."

THEY dismounted near the crest of the hill overlooking the valley, and squatted down to eat of the food from their saddle packs. And soon thereafter, Xerbus, who had constantly been scanning the southern sky, suddenly jumped to his feet.

"A bilmo!" he shouted. "Coming this way! It must be Bogolresh."

What at first had been little more than a moving speck above the southern horizon, was beginning to swell into the outlines of one of the streamlined aircraft of the Lilliputians. The prince and his companion watched as it sped toward them at an altitude of a thousand feet.

Marsi sprang to his feet, and the two men waved their arms wildly to attract the attention of those aloft. The great ship was almost directly overhead by this time, and for a moment Xerbus feared its occupants had failed to see him and his friend.

And then the bilmo turned in a wide circle, its speed was sharply reduced and the thirty-foot aircraft nosed down to come rapidly earthward.

While still a hundred feet above the ground, it ceased its forward motion, hovered above the hill's crest for a moment, then, like a falling leaf, came lightly to rest on the grassy peak.

Xerbus and Frelock had mounted their horses as the ship began to settle, and reached the side of the craft as the control-cabin door swung open.

Bogolresh was a tall, stoop-shouldered

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Lilliputian of middle-age, whose heavy-featured face showed nothing of the keenly intelligent mind it masked. He appeared in the doorway and gestured impatiently to the men on horse-back.

"Get in," he said rapidly. "I saw the Woman Mountain from the air. We'll drop the bilmo a blustrug away from her and carry the equipment by hand."

Xerbus and Marsi Frelock scrambled through into the roomy cabin and Bogolresh went back to the controls. A moment later the great ship was in the air.

Through the doorway that led into the body of the plane, Xerbus could see four men, clad in the colorless garments of workers, busy assembling small twin machines, consisting of tubes, electrical relays, switches and much wiring.

"We'll have to hurry," Xerbus told the scientist. "It's been the better part of an hour since Marsi and I found her sleeping. She may awake at any moment."

The scientist, whose brilliant uniform of an officer of His Majesty's army sat badly on his stooped figure, flipped a switch on the instrument panel and the flying craft began to settle earthward.

"I'll put that grove of trees between us and the Quinlom Flestrin," he announced. "If she wakes before we can put the machines into operation . . . well, she'll *have* to sleep again, sometime."

XERBUS' answer was cut off as the streamlined airship came gently to rest on Lilliput's surface. Instantly the large door in the ship's body was thrown open and the workers, moving with quick celerity, swung the two compact machines to the ground. Bogolresh, heavy coils of uninsulated wiring across either shoulder, issued a brief command to his assistants, and the machines, two men to each, were lifted and borne rapidly away.

Bogolresh, his heavy golden helmet bobbing awkwardly on his queerly shaped head, followed them at a trot, Xerbus and Frelock at his heels.

The seven men skirted the arm of trees and came into sight of the sleeping Woman Mountain. At their first awe-struck glimpse of her at short range, Bogolresh's assistants came to an involuntary halt with mouths agape. Even the master scientist, who had been eagerly looking forward to this moment, betrayed his sudden misgivings.

But he recovered quickly and gave succinct orders. "Get that Z-ray set up at her head. Controls to read 12-17, 8 over 11. You others get down to her feet and set controls to correspond. I'll string the wires."

Xerbus and Marsi Frelock stood on a grassy knoll close by and watched Bogolresh and his four co-workers in action. They saw the two machines put into position, one at either end of the sleeping figure of the female giant, while the master scientist, scurrying about like an ant in the shadow of a fallen tree, clamped one end of a coil of wire to the Z-ray apparatus, then turned and ran toward the other machine some sixty-five feet away, paying out the wire as he went. When he had reached the second machine, he cut away the extra wire and attached it to the metal lead-ins, then repeated the entire performance on the opposite side of the huge mound of sleeping womanhood.

Within ten minutes of the Lilliputians arrival, the lovely body of Elaine Purwin, wrapped in the tattered folds of what once had been an expensive dinner gown, was completely encircled by a fine line of naked wire. Linked

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to the wire were twin machines, an alert workman poised at the plunger of each and awaiting a signal from his superior.

Bogolresh, panting from his exertions, came clumsily up the grassy knoll to join Xerbus and the sardonic Marsi Frelock.

"All is in readiness, Your Highness," he announced impressively. "At my signal the circuits will be closed simultaneously. Then you shall be privileged to see a sight unique in the history of Lilliput."

Xerbus nodded. There was no pleasure in his expression. "Get on with it, then," he said shortly.

. . . Elaine Purwin stirred under the prodding of muscles aching from long contact with the ground. She stretched, took a deep breath and her eyelids fluttered as she began to awaken. . . .

"For the love of Orid!" Xerbus shouted in panic. "Act, before it is too late!"

Instantly Bogolresh's hand swept up. The men at the machines tensed, their eyes on that uplifted hand. Then it came down in a sweeping arc, and simultaneously the plungers on both machines were rammed home. . . .

CHAPTER VI

Search

IT WAS not until shortly before noon that Elaine's absence was noticed. The three men had spent the entire morning erecting a rude, two-sectioned shelter with material taken from the wrecked power boat.

Captain John Douglas drove home a nail in the roof of the structure, his hammer a short length of metal that once had been a part of the shell-wrecked motor. He paused for a moment to watch Bouchaix prop up one of the shack's flimsy walls with a length of boat planking.

"Hey, Bouchaix!" It was Gregg's throaty growl, from the opposite side of the structure. "Tell that *Miss* Purwin to rustle up some chow, will ya? I'm starvin'."

Douglas grinned a little. That word, "Miss," had been for his benefit. Joe and he had reached an understanding over the former's treatment of Elaine—and, thanks to Bouchaix' efforts, it had been reached without bloodshed. Douglas knew that the entire incident still rankled in the gunner's mind, but he was confident there would be no fresh outbreak.

"I haven't seen her around all morning," Bouchaix replied loudly. "She walked away from camp while we were having breakfast."

Douglas dropped the few feet between roof and ground and paused beside the mechanic. "Come to think of it," he said, a trace of concern in his voice, "she's been away several hours. I hope nothing's happened to her."

Bouchaix frowned. "I've seen nothing around here so far that could have hurt her."

Gregg came around the corner of the shack in time to hear his last words. "Somethin' happen to our Miss Purwin?" he asked, with burlesqued anxiety.

Douglas kept his temper. "We don't know yet. She left camp around breakfast time and hasn't been seen since."

"I wouldn't worry about her," Gregg said. "Maybe she found some Japs around here and moved in with them!"

Douglas said slowly, "Now, look, Gregg. I thought—"

Bouchaix, the pacifist, stepped into the breech. "If we're going to eat, we'd better find our cook," he grinned.

It broke the tension. "You're right, Bouchaix," Douglas said. "She'll have to be found. Tell you what: Bouchaix,

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you come with me. You stay here, Gregg, and keep an eye on the camp. If the girl shows up while we're gone, build a fire with wood that's been dampened a little. That'll make a smoke we can see for quite a distance, and we'll know she's come back.

"Too bad we lost our small guns. For all we know, this place may be inhabited by unfriendly natives. If you see signs of anything like that, hide out until we get back."

The captain stepped lightly over to the heap of furnishings salvaged from the PT boat and selected two lengths of metal tubing, each about a foot and a half long. He tossed one of them to Bouchaix, then turned back to Joe Gregg.

"Okay, soldier; see you later. . . . Come on, Bouchaix."

Joe Gregg watched their retreating backs as they walked into the south. Thoughtfully he fingered the heavy hammer in his ham-like hands, and a speculative light mingled with the sullen hatred in his eyes.

"Wise guy, hunh?" he muttered. "Him and his girl friend! Just give me the chance, and by God I'll get 'em both!"

A HALF hour passed in silence as Bouchaix and Douglas strode across rolling plains and low hills. Overhead, a hot noon sun flooded the countryside, bringing perspiration to the skins of both men.

Bouchaix was a few paces in advance of the captain as they approached the summit of a low hill. As he topped the rise, he halted in mid-stride and uttered a surprised exclamation.

"What's the matter?" Douglas demanded, coming up beside him.

In answer, the mechanic pointed to the ground a few yards ahead.

Douglas, following the pointing finger, said, "Well, for the love— It's a path, fella. But there's certainly not much to it as far as size is concerned."

They came up to the eight inch strip of glass-like rock, which followed the curve of the hillside to disappear beyond the nearby slope.

Douglas, in unconscious imitation of Elaine's action a few hours before, knelt and passed his hand lightly along the smooth surface.

"Too narrow to be a path," he commented, rising to his feet. "More likely it's a boundary line of some kind. Made of a peculiar material; something like glass . . . or lava."

He absent-mindedly brushed at the knees of his tattered pants. "For want of a better trail, we'll follow this. It's entirely possible that Miss Purwin did so. If she did, she may have run into whoever lives around here and they may be holding her."

For another half hour they followed the winding contours of the thread-like "boundary line." In all that time they caught no sight of any living creature. Only the seemingly limitless stretches of grass-covered, tree-dotted plains and gentle swell of hills.

Finally Captain John Douglas called a halt.

"We'd better start back, Bouchaix," he said wearily. "We're probably wasting our time. The girl may have returned to camp by this time. I hate to think of her being there alone with Gregg."

As they retraced their steps, Douglas' spirits sank lower and lower. He made no attempt to rationalize his feeling of depression over the girl's absence. All he knew, now, was that he wanted her back—desperately.

By the time the two men had reached the crest of the low hill overlooking the camp, it was mid-afternoon.

Douglas came to a faltering stop. He

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said, "I don't see any sign of her." There was a complete lack of emotion in his voice as he added, "Nor of Gregg, either."

"They may be in the hut," Bouchaix said.

"That," Douglas said bluntly, "is what I'm afraid of."

Before the other could comment, the officer had started briskly down the slope, his eyes fixed unwaveringly on the rudely constructed shack, his heart thundering with mingled rage and fear.

There was no door to open. Douglas paused on the threshold, eyes probing the dusky interior. Bouchaix came up to peer in over his shoulder.

The hut was empty of life.

Douglas backed away, his rapid glance sweeping the deserted plain surrounding them. Then he threw back his head and yelled "Gregg!" with all the power of his lungs.

No answering sound reached the two men. Only silence, complete and . . . threatening.

Bouchaix summed it up, his voice shaking a little. "He's gone. . . ."

John Douglas nodded absently, his eyes still searching the horizons. "Yes. He's gone. *That makes two of them!*"

* * *

AFTER Douglas and Bouchaix had disappeared into the south, Joe Gregg set about preparing his own lunch. He rekindled a small fire on the ashes of last night's blaze, warmed up a can of beans and some corned beef, and brewed black coffee in an empty can.

He was still seething inwardly over his brush with the officer. Joe had served three hitches in the regular army before Pearl Harbor, and his poorly concealed contempt for West Point officers had had much to do with keeping him from becoming even a non-com. For some reason he had disliked Captain John Douglas from the first, and to have the younger man champion a girl who, in his opinion, was no more than a Japanese agent! . . .

Because of his training, he cleared away the remains of his meal, then began a rummaging search for cigarettes among the stores taken from the wrecked mosquito boat. In the breast pocket of a tattered pair of coveralls he turned up a crumpled package of Camels, half filled. Lighting one with a brand from the fire, he stretched out on the grass and settled himself for a *siesta*.

"Your attention, Quinbus Flestrin," squeaked a tiny voice.

Joe Gregg sat up with a jerk. He glanced hurriedly about, his scalp prickling.

"Please do not move," the minute voice continued calmly. "We have no desire to be crushed."

Slowly Joe Gregg turned his head toward the sound of the faint words. And then his already wide eyes became even wider and an astonished exclamation was forced from his lips.

Four tiny men, the tallest not more than six inches in height, were standing together a few feet away and staring up at him. They were clad in identical costumes: a knee-length tunic with flowing sleeves, with a cape caught about the neck and depending along the back. Their heads were bared, disclosing hair of uniform black, worn long.

One, upon whose shoulders sat a certain hauteur and dignity which the others seemed to lack, served as spokesman. He waited patiently until some of the incredulity faded from the gunner's face, then said:

"Greeting, Quinbus Flestrin. I, Rylardu, *Galbet** of Blefuscu, have come

* Galbet—An Army ranking, comparable to Chief of Staff.—Ed.

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to treat with you. Those with me are members of my own staff."

"Well, slant my eyes and call me Tojo!" Gregg gasped. "You're *people!*"

A shade of annoyance crossed the face of the diminutive officer. "Certainly we are human. Why should that surprise you?"

JOE'S tone was a mixture of conciliation and amusement. "No reason, I guess. After all, this is *your* neck of the woods. Looks like that dizzy dame wasn't so dizzy when she claimed she'd seen some little guy on a horse. By the way, boys, what's the name of this here, er—country?"

"This," Rylardu said stiffly, "is the kingdom of Lilliput. But we are from the neighboring kingdom of Blefuscu, which lies some six blustrugs across the water from Lillput."

"Lilliput," mused Gregg. "I've heard that name somewhere before. A book, or something told me when I was a kid . . ."

"Certainly you must know of Lilliput," Rylardu said impatiently. "It is one of the most powerful countries in the world."

"But not for long!" interrupted one of his companions hotly. "Soon it shall be no more than a vassal state to Blefuscu!"

Rylardu turned angrily on the speaker. "Still your wagging tongue, Sydoldo! *I* shall do the talking."

The other retreated a step. "Yes, your Lordship. I spoke without thinking."

Rylardu turned back to Gregg. "A man from your own country visited Lilliput many wokas ago. Surely he made some mention of our countries when he returned to your land."

"Maybe," Gregg admitted. "What was his name?"

"He called himself Goliber."*

"Goliber," repeated Gregg slowly. "No; can't say I ever— Wait a minute. *Gulliver?* Why— Why, sure! I remember reading some kind of fairy story called 'Gulliver's Travels', when I was a kid. It told about the little peo- of Lilliput."

"Of course," Rylardu said smugly. "Doubtless Goliber told of its might so clearly that the men of your country were careful to stay far away. For in all the hundreds of wokas since, you and your party are the first of your kind to set foot on its shores."

Gregg was on the point of making a retort that would not have been well received; then, thinking better of it, said instead:

"You said you and your gang had come to 'treat' with me—whatever that means. So go right ahead—the treat's on you!"

"Yes," Rylardu said eagerly. "First, however, I must have your word as an honorable man that what I am about to say will not be repeated by you, regardless of your decision."

"Why, sure," Gregg told him carelessly. "You can trust me, buddy. Go right ahead."

RYLARDU, his squeamishness over Gregg's tremendous bulk forgotten, came closer to the gunner's side, lowered his voice until it was barely audible to the American, and said:

"An army of twelve thousand Blefuscuians was landed secretly on Lilliput's shores two days ago. We were prepared to march on Mildendo, the capital city, when one of our scouts reported the presence of four Quinbus Flestrins at this point.

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* In the two hundred and forty years since Gulliver visited Lilliput, his name had become distorted in the language of the two countries to Goliber.—ED.

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"When the news was received, we became greatly concerned; for it was during a war with Lilliput that the first Quinbus Flestrin, known as Goliber, visited these shores. And it was because of his intervention that Blefuscu was defeated, as he captured all of our ships, making it impossible for us to invade Lilliput.

"And then the thought came to me that perhaps your party could be won to our cause. Probably we could win the war without you, since the element of surprise would be on our side; but there would be the possibility that the Lilliputians would win you to *their* cause—a chance we dare not take.

"You see, we are at peace with Lilliput. Its people do not dream that we are about to attack them; and our bilmos will be destroying their homes and their lives before realization comes to them."

Gregg nodded cynically. "Just like the Japs at Pearl Harbor," he murmured.

"You said—"

"Never mind. Tell me more."

"Of course. . . . Earlier today, my staff and I entered your camp, unobserved. We found only three of you, instead of the four our report had indicated. But, overhearing your conversations, we understood. And when angry words passed between you and one of the others, we were troubled. It might be hard to gain the cooperation of men who fought amongst themselves.

"After the others had gone away to hunt the missing Quinbus Flestrin, we talked amongst ourselves. The decision was made to approach you with a plea for your assistance. With you at the head of our army, we could approach Lilliput and call upon them to surrender without a fight. Since we expect to take over Lilliput, we should not like to damage property and slay people who will soon belong to us."

Joe Gregg nodded. "A nice tight little scheme," he admitted with frank admiration. "There's only one question, though: What do I get out of it?"

"That, too, we have decided," the Blefuscuian replied. "Once you have helped us conquer Lilliput, the combined resources of both countries will be put to the task of constructing a craft large enough to take you back to your own people. Food enough to last until you reach your country will also be furnished."

Joe thought for a moment. "What about the others?" he asked finally.

"It would require many wokas to build so large a boat," Rylardu observed cautiously.

THE gunner fingered his lip reflectively. Why should he worry about Douglas and Bouchaix? He hadn't brought them here; let them leave as best they could. Probably do that damn captain good to be left behind. The only thing was, would the two of them try to prevent him from helping the men of Blefuscu? Chances were, he told himself, that the whole thing could be pulled off without either Douglas or Bouchaix knowing anything about it—at least until it was all over.

"How do I know," he said at last, "that you'll keep your word?"

The microscopic Rylardu drew himself up haughtily. "You have the pledge of a Hurgo of Blefuscu."

"Unh hunh!" Gregg said mockingly. "And the little guys of Lilliput have your 'pledge' that there is peace between your countries!"

The Galbet flushed. "You are of such great size," he pointed out, "that if we did not keep our promise, you could destroy us all."

Gregg was satisfied. "That's right.

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I guess you wouldn't have much choice. So . . . it's a deal!"

"Excellent!" Rylardu's relief and satisfaction were reflected in the faces of his staff. "The army of Blefuscu is encamped about a hundred blustrugs west of here. I suggest that you come there with us. Bring a quantity of your own food stores, as we do not have sufficient for you and our own forces. Once victory is ours, there will be plenty for you."

Gregg got to his feet and entered the hut. He tossed a dozen or so cans of food into a bag, then came out.

"What about this hundred blustrugs?" he asked. "Sounds like a heck of a long trip to me."

"Not at all," Rylardu assured him. "The history of Goliber, which—along with his language—the ruling classes of both Blefuscu and Lilliput must learn, mentions that the Quinbus Flestrin computed one of our blustrugs to equal one twelfth of what he termed a mile."

Joe Gregg laboriously figured it out in his head. "In other words," he summed up, "a hundred blustrugs is the same as about eight miles. Oughta do that in a couple hours, easy."

"It will take longer," Rylardu told him. "For we, even on our horses, cannot equal your pace."

The gunner scratched his head "Yeah. . . . But look—why not let me put the four of you in one or two of my pockets, and your horses in another? That way I can take the bunch of you along with me."

Rylardu ignored his affrighted staff. "A magnificent idea!" he breathed.

CHAPTER VII

Golbasto Gue

ELAINE PURWIN was conscious of a sharp, throbbing sensation that seemed to center just behind her forehead. So intense was the pain that she groaned aloud.

"Lie still," a masculine voice said. "Very soon the hurt will go away."

As though the words had been some sort of command, the pressing weight on her brain seemed slowly to lessen; and some five minutes later she felt well enough to open her eyes.

She was lying on a narrow couch. In the metal wall at one side of her was a row of glass-covered portholes. Bending above her was a very handsome young man of about her own age, interest and concern in the depths of his flashing, intelligent brown eyes. He was wearing a blue tunic with wide sleeves, and a cape of gold cloth hung from his shoulders. A peaked helmet of gold sat atop his black hair, worn in an almost feminine bob.

Elaine said, in a dazed voice: "How did I— Who are you and—"

The young man smiled engagingly. "You are perfectly safe," he said, in excellent English. "At present you are in a royal bilmo on the way to Mildendo. I am His Royal Highness, Xerbus, Prince of Lilliput."

If anything, the explanation served only to confuse her still more. The throbbing in her head had subsided almost to nothing, and she moved as though to sit up. Instantly the young prince put out his hand to aid her, then placed a pillow comfortably at her back.

She looked down at her travel-stained dress, and from that to the room about her.

Her first impression told her she was in the cabin of some sort of plane, although she could hear no engines. The cabin itself was some twelve feet long and about two-thirds as wide. Forward, were twin glass-paneled doors, beyond which she could see the back

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of the pilot and a section of a control panel.

A tall, gangling man with heavy features and wearing a brilliant costume similar to that of Xerbus, rose from his seat against the opposite wall and approached her.

"How do you feel now?" he asked warmly.

An uncertain smile touched the corners of the girl's lovely mouth. "Why . . . better, thank you. But I do wish you'd tell me how I got here. You see, I was sleeping near some shrubbery and . . ."

The older man nodded. "Yes," he said. "It was there we found you. I am Bogolresh, leading scientist of Lilliput. This is indeed a great day for my country. The machine worked perfectly, just as I—"

A puzzled frown replaced Elaine's smile. "'Machine?'" she repeated slowly. "What machine?"

"Why, the machine that—"

XERBUS interrupted him with a curtness as surprising to himself as it was to Bogolresh. "That will do!" he snapped. "You may leave us, Hurgo."

The scientist hesitated, then bowed humbly. "As Your Majesty wishes," he said stiffly, and strode with calm dignity into the control cabin, closing the door gently at his back.

The young prince turned to Elaine and smiled. "We shall soon be in Mildendo," he said. "It is a beautiful city. Already, we have been in touch with Belfaborac—the palace. There you will find my father, His puissant Highness, Golbasto Momaren Evlame Gurdilo Shefin Mully Ully Gue, to welcome you."

"Goodness!" Elaine gasped. "Is all *that* his name?"

"But, of course! As a matter of fact, it will be *my* name, some day. Every ruler of Lilliput receives that name the day he is crowned."

"For some reason," Elaine said, a far-away expression in her eyes, "the names of your father are familiar. As though I had heard them before, long ago. And you say this land is called Lilliput? . . . Why, of course! I remember! Lilliput and Golbasto Gue! In *Gulliver's Travels!*"

Xerbus was smiling "Yes," he said; "we knew him—at least our people of that ancient day knew him—as Goliber."

Anger, sudden and complete, darkened the girl's face. "Thank you for trying to amuse me," she said coldly. "Now, please tell me exactly who you are and where I am."

Xerbus' jaw sagged in surprise. "But I don't understand. I *have* told you! I am the Prince Xerbus, and my father is His Majesty Golbasto Momaren Ev—"

"Please!" cried Elaine, covering her ears. "Don't go through all *that* again!"

"But—but you wanted to know who—"

"Listen, Prince Xerbus, or whatever you call yourself." Elaine's mingled anger and bewilderment began to blaze. "I know—and you should realize that I know—that Lilliput is a land in a fairy tale. So why must you insist that this is the actual place Jonathan Swift told about in his—his fable? Besides, you speak English and ride around in airplanes. As I remember it, the Lilliputians spoke their own language and rode *horses* . . ."

Her voice faltered there, as from her memory came the picture of a little man on a tiny horse, picked out against the background of shadowy shrubs by the flickering light of a campfire. . . .

Xerbus said quietly, "Naturally there is much you do not understand.

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Your language was taught to our learned scholars by Goliber during his stay here many wokas ago. In turn, it has been taught to members of the Court against the day that another Quinbus Flestrin might reach our shores.

"In the last four hundred wokas the people of Lilliput have made great strides in the world of science. Not only have we learned air travel by bilmo—other great inventions are ours."

The young man's evident sincerity was very convincing, Elaine admitted to herself. But he had failed to explain the one thing that made all of his testimony meaningless.

"If you are truly a Lilliputian," she said, "why are you about six feet tall, *instead of six inches?*"

Xerbus regarded her soberly. "The writings of the Ancients explain the measurements you mention. By the same scale, how tall do you consider yourself?"

Something began to nag at the back of her mind. "Why, I—I'm five feet, four inches. But what has—"

"No," Xerbus said gently. "You, by your own standards, are less than five and a half *inches* in height!"

ELAINE'S first reaction was a burst of laughter. "This gets better and better!" she gasped. "I suppose I should feel like Alice in Wonderland after she ate the cake, or whatever it was. How did all this happen?"

Whereupon, Xerbus related all that had taken place since the moment he and Marsi Frelock had first glimpsed her sleeping figure beside the grove of trees. When he was done, Elaine sat deep in thought for several minutes.

No longer did she doubt him. Every statement he had made had been corroborated completely and with finality. The thought that she was no more than a twelfth of her former size came as a distinct shock; but the fact that everything and every person in this world had been created to that same scale, softened the first impact.

"But why?" she asked at last, the question a plea. "Why did you have to—to shrink me?"

"Such is the Law," replied Xerbus evenly. "It was made long ago, to prevent any other Quinbus Flestrin from damaging the property of the Lilliputian people or bringing them possible injury."

Elaine bit her lip. "What of the others?" she asked. "Have they been shrunken, too?"

Alarm and amazement washed over the face of the young prince. "What others?" he demanded. "You mean there are other Quinbus Flestrins on Lilliput?"

"Of course," the girl said, surprised. "I thought you knew. There are three: Captain Douglas, Drexel Bouchaix and Joe Gregg—all American soldiers."

A sudden thought struck her. "You'd better restore me to my right size at once," she added. "When they find I am missing, they'll set out to find me. They may do your country a great deal of harm."

Without replying, Prince Xerbus rose to his feet, turned and went into the control cabin, closing the door behind him. Elaine watched him hold an earnest colloquy with the tall, gangling Bogolresh. Finally Bogolresh said a few rapid words to the pilot, and immediately the bilmo increased its speed.

FOR the balance of the trip, Elaine Purwin was left alone in the passenger cabin. Half an hour later, the bullet-shaped ship nosed groundward at its destination.

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Elaine stood up and glanced from one of the portholes. Below her were the broad streets of a mammoth city, its outer edges lined by a great square wall. In the exact center of the city stood a large stone castle-like building, encircled by a level field several hundred yards in width.

It was toward the field that the pilot was directing his ship. The ground rushed up to meet it, and Elaine caught a glimpse of many people rushing from gates in the castle wall.

There was a gentle, grating sound as the bilmo landed. Xerbus entered the passenger cabin, his face expressionless.

"Come," he said to Elaine. "We are at Belfaborac—the palace of my father, Golbasto Gue, Supreme Lord of Lilliput. We go, now, to meet him."

An attendant opened a door in the side of the bilmo, and Xerbus and Bogolresh, with Elaine Purwin between them, descended to the ground.

An open carriage, drawn by three pairs of white horses, stood several yards from the bilmo. Its single occupant, other than a liveried driver, was a short, pompous-appearing man with swelling paunch and sagging jowls. He was wearing a tunic of gold cloth, heavily embroidered; a voluminous purple cape, edged in gold, was drawn about his shoulders and caught together at the throat by a massive golden clasp. A jewel-studded helmet of gold sat with dignity on his huge head.

Elaine permitted her escorts to lead her across the short distance to the carriage. They halted a few feet away, the two men bowed low before the paunchy one, and Xerbus spoke to him at length in a language completely unintelligible to the listening girl.

Several times he indicated Elaine by gesture, referring to her as Quinlom Flestrin. When he was done, the fat one crooked an imperious finger to Elaine, saying, in flawless English, "Come closer, Quinlom."

The girl, wavering between amusement and concern, obeyed. For a moment the sovereign ran his eyes appreciatively over her lovely face and thinly clad figure.

He said, in a deep, rolling voice, "I, Golbasto Gue, Emperior of Lilliput, Lord of the Sun, the Moon, and the Twelve Thousand Stars, welcome you, Quinlom Flestrin. In all our glorious history, you are the first of your kind to meet us on terms of equal size."

He hesitated, as though expecting a reply.

"I thank Your Majesty," Elaine said uncomfortably.

GOLBASTO GUE nodded with satisfaction. At least, the girl knew how to address royalty. "Very well. During your stay in Lilliput you shall be my guest. A suite of rooms has already been prepared for you. Of course, you will be at liberty to go wherever you wish—"

"Thank you." Elaine's relief was evident. At least, she told herself happily, she would not be an actual prisoner.

"—as long as you do not leave the palace," concluded the king.

Once more, Prince Xerbus spoke to his father in the Lilliputian tongue. Golbasto Gue heard him out, a frown settling slowly into place on his heavy brows. He nodded finally and said a few words. Immediately, Xerbus and Bogolresh bowed low and turned to reenter the bilmo.

Xerbus hesitated, then turned back to Elaine. "You will be well cared for here," he told her reassuringly. "When I return to Belfaborac, I will come to see you."

Elaine, dazed by his sudden show of solicitude, watched him enter the bilmo.

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At once, the rocket-like craft was rising into the air.

"Where are they going?" Elaine asked the monarch, her thoughts on Captain Douglas and his companions. As long as they remained their true size, her hopes for rescue and restoration to normalcy would remain alive. But if Xerbus and Bogolresh were successful in finding the others unprepared . . .

On the surface of things, Golbasto Gue's reply to her question was irrelevant. "The prince Xerbus, my son, is betrothed to Lolith, princess of Blefuscu," he said.

Elaine stared at him wonderingly. "That's nice," she said hesitantly. "I just wondered. . . . Oh, but that's silly! I mean . . . Well, I'm glad. She must be a wonderful girl," she finished lamely, her face red.

Golbasto Gue's porcine eyes were observing every expression that passed across her lovely face. When she was silent, he inclined his head in a brief bow, said, "Please sit here beside me. I, Golbasto Gue, will conduct you to your apartment, personally."

Elaine entered the carriage and sat down next to the broad-beamed emperor. At once the vehicle jerked into motion, the six white horses moving swiftly under the coachman's reins.

* * *

"HOW about some more beans?" Douglas asked, handing his tin plate to Bouchaix.

The machinist removed the pot from the bed of coals and scooped some of its contents onto the plate. There was less than an hour of daylight remaining. The hut cast a long shadow across the pair seated beside the fire.

They finished the meal in almost unbroken silence. The thoughts of both men were on their missing companions and their mysterious disappearance.

By the time they had finished eating, darkness was closing in around the fire. Bouchaix wordlessly cleared away the pots and plates and came back to the blaze to sit and to stare into the wavering flames.

The two men talked for a while, more to relieve the pall of depression that seemed to grow heavier as the hours passed. They spoke of their homes and their lives before the war and of the war itself. They spoke in low voices, and at times the words would trail off in mid-sentence as they listened intently for sounds that never came.

After a while, Douglas noticed that Bouchiax' eyes were growing heavy. "Better get some sleep, fella," he advised. "I'll stand watch for a few hours; then you can take over."

Bouchaix nodded without speaking. Rising, he picked up a heavy sea-coat, wrapped himself in its folds, crossed to the opposite side of the fire, and lay down on the ground. Moments later, he was sound asleep and breathing heavily.

Later, Douglas went into the shack to get a coat for protection against the chill breeze from off the Pacific. He added fuel to the fire, and sat down again, leaning his back against a rest fashioned from planks of the PT boat.

Two hours dragged by. The flames dancing before his eyes seemed to have an almost hypnotic effect. He saw in them the faces of his mother and his two sisters, and even the almost forgotten features of his father, dead these many years.

But superimposed on those faces was another—that of a lovely girl in a fuchsia gown. And it was this vision that persisted and strengthened and grew—until John Douglas closed his eyes to her loveliness and his heart to her appeal. . . .

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How long he slept, Douglas did not know. But suddenly his eyes were open and he was instantly alert. Yet no muscle of his moved, other than his eyes alone, as a clarion note of danger shrilled soundlessly in his mind.

At first he saw nothing other than the flicker of dying flames and the encroaching shadows of the night. And then something scurried noiselessly along the ground near his feet—something tiny and quick . . . and menacing. Even as he caught that motion, he saw something else—a thin, coppery thread, hardly thicker than a hair, that lay on the ground beside him. Had it not been for its reflection of the wavering flames, he might have missed it entirely.

CAPTAIN JOHN DOUGLAS had been trained to think and to act simultaneously. And he did so now—instinctively and with violence.

As though propelled by powerful springs, the captain shot to his feet. He felt something metallic and tiny crunch beneath one of his shoes. At the same instant, he caught sight of several tiny human figures fleeing wildly across the open ground toward the patch of shrubs.

"Bouchaix!" he yelled, even as he dived forward, hands outstretched. He skidded a short distance on his chest, and felt his fingers close about a diminutive body.

"What happened, Captain? Are you all right?"

Drexel Bouchaix was standing over him, a short metal bar in one fist, his expression one of mingled fear and astonishment.

Douglas, fingers tight about his captive, scrambled to his feet. "Come over to the fire," he said. "I think I've got something interesting to show you."

Under the uncertain light of the blaze, they bent their heads to examine Douglas' prize. Slowly he uncurled his strong fingers . . . then both men audibly gasped unbelievingly.

A man, no more than six inches in height, lay in his palm. He was wearing a blue tunic, golden cape, high boots and a peculiar, peaked helmet.

"Gawda'mighty!" muttered Bouchaix. "He's a human!"

"Hope I didn't squeeze him too hard," Douglas said in hushed tones. "He's out cold."

The little figure stirred, then, and sought to sit up. Douglas extended an uncertain forefinger and helped him to do so.

"Thank you." The voice was thin and high, hardly more than a cricket chirp in volume. "That was a close call."

"Who *are* you?" Douglas' voice shook with bewilderment.

"I am Xerbus of Lilliput. You know of my country through the writings of Goliber, your countryman, who visited us long ago."

"Lilliput?" repeated Douglas, aware that his eyes were popping exactly as were Bouchaix'. "Goliber. . . . Wait a minute. Jonathan Swift's 'Gulliver's Travels!' But that was a work of imagination. Pure fiction. Done as a satire."

"I am sure," said the little man stiffly, "that my appearance bears out the truth of Goliber's writings.

Douglas shook his head as though to clear his vision. "I can't believe it!" he mused. "You do fit his description of the Lilliputians, though."

He took a deep breath. "Okay, so you're from Lilliput. Is that where we are now?"

"Yes."

"Hmmm . . . Tell me, Prince, what were you and your friends snooping around the camp for?"

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Xerbus' eyes wavered "We were curious . . ."

"Wait a minute," Douglas snapped. He bent and carefully scanned the grass between the fire and the grove of trees. And then his free hand shot out, to come up with a small, crushed cube of metal, from which dangled two long strands of hair-thin wiring.

"'Curious', hunh?" he g r o w l e d. "What about this contraption, Prince?"

The man in his palm averted his eyes, and said nothing.

SLOWLY Douglas' hand began to tighten about the minute body. "Come on, little guy. Spill it. What have you done with the other two of our party?"

Xerbus' jaw set firmly and he did not speak. Gradually the pressure increased as the folds of the hand contracted. . . .

"Enough!" gasped the Lilliputian suddenly. "Orid help me, but I can endure no more. We—we took her."

Douglas gaped at him, and his fingers relaxed. "*Took* her? How could you? She's as big as we are."

"She was shrunken. We found her asleep—"

Douglas was shaken by a sudden rush of anger and fear so intense that he marvelled at it, even as he acted. His hand contracted about the Lilliputian's middle and he brought the wee one close to his face, glaring at him savagely.

"Where is she?" he roared. "What do you mean by 'shrunken'? By God, if you've harmed that girl, I'll—"

Xerbus, staring up at the great eyes, each, to him, almost a foot across, felt a wave of horror choke at his throat. Pain coursed through him as he lay there, too paralyzed even to attempt to struggle.

Slowly Douglas' hold relaxed as his anger faded. "Where is she?" he demanded, almost whispering.

Xerbus slumped against the palm, fighting for breath. "In Mildendo," he panted. "At the palace."

"How far from here?"

"Three hundred blustrugs."

"Blustrugs?"

"You would regard it as twenty-five of your miles."

Douglas made his decision. "Bouchaix!"

"Yes, Captain?"

"Get some supplies together. We're taking a twenty-five mile hike."

"When?"

"When? When, hell! Starting right now!"

"Right." Bouchaix started for the hut.

"Now, Prince Xerbus," said Douglas, returning his gaze to the figure in his hand. "To get back to you. You, my shrimp friend, are going to lead us to this Mildendo."

"I—"

"Yes. And if the girl isn't put back in proper shape the minute we get there, it'll be tough on you, little man. Your gang has her and I've got you. Kind of a Mexican standoff. But you being a prince should make them see things my way."

He thought for a moment, then scooped a bit of shrub from the stack of firewood. This he placed in the bottom of his shirt pocket, then stood the prince upright in the same pocket. Xerbus discovered that, by standing on the block of wood, the pocket's upper edge came high up on his chest, so that he could see clearly while securely held from falling. He stared down at the earth, some fifty or sixty feet below, and drew a quivering breath.

Bouchaix came out of the hut, a canvas bag tied to his back. "I'm ready, chief."

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"Okay. Better put out the fire. . . . All set, Xerbus?"

The Lilliputian's thin voice was barely audible. "Yes. But—"

"No buts," Douglas said crisply. "Which way do we go?"

"Mildendo lies to the south-east."

"That's all I want to know. . . . Come on, Bouchaix."

CHAPTER VIII

Capture

IT was not far from midnight when a rapidly moving bilmo split the air above Mildendo, capital city of Lilliput, and plunged to a breath-taking landing at the palace field.

Hardly had the craft come to rest, than the control cabin's door was flung open and the tall, stooped figure of Bogolresh, master scientist of Lilliput, leaped to the ground and raced toward the looming walls of Belfaborac.

A few minutes later he was outside the wing of the palace containing the royal suite, and angrily demanding that he be admitted to the royal presence of Golbasto Gue.

"But His Majesty has retired," protested Rotarlo, the ruler's personal secretary. "Surely your message, however urgent, can wait until morning."

"If it does," Bogolresh said grimly, "your body will be without a head! Do as I say—and quickly!"

The pinched face of the aged secretary blanched at the threat and his bowed shoulders seemed to support an additional burden. "Wait here," he said meekly, "and I shall inform His Highness of the urgency of your errand."

Bogolresh began a nervous pacing of the mosaic flooring of the richly furnished ante-room the moment Rotarlo had disappeared beyond the hangings of the inner doorway. By the time he had made half a dozen turns, the hangings parted again, and the secretary emerged from the inner room.

"His Exalted Highness will see you now," he said agitatedly. "But I warn you, he is not pleased at being disturbed."

Bogolresh shrugged. "Usher me into his presence," he growled. "Your croakings waste time."

Golbasto Gue, his paunchy bulk encased in a nightgown of imperial green, regarded the visitor coldly from the depths of a vast, richly carved bed.

"Come in, Bogolresh," he said unpleasantly, at sight of the man in the doorway.

The scientist approached the bed and bowed his head humbly, awaiting permission to speak.

Purposely the ruler delayed giving that permission. He stretched leisurely, patted his paunch without affection, and adjusted his pillows. Finally his curiosity over the other's visit overcame his desire to annoy him.

"Stop dangling there like the branch of a dead tree," he said gruffly, "and tell me why you find it necessary to disturb me at this hour."

Bogolresh's face betrayed no emotion. He said, "I have come to inform Your Highness that your son has been captured by the Quinbus Flestrins!"

He disregarded the king's gasp of astonishment, and continued. "Also, two of the Man Mountains are approaching Mildendo, the prince with them as prisoner."

Golbasto Gue came out of his bed with an agility that belied his bulk. "Rotarlo!" he bellowed, ignoring his visitor. "Rotarlo, you withered fool! Get me clothing!"

THE startled secretary entered, almost running, and hastened to fetch

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tunic, sandals and cape. The king dressed rapidly, snatched his helmet from Rotarlo's trembling fingers, and turned to the silent Bogolresh.

"How much time have we?" he demanded.

"Time?"

"Yes, idiot—*time!* Before the Man Mountains arrive?"

"Until dawn—or shortly before. They are—"

"Stop prattling, and listen!" Golbasto Gue snarled. Not for nothing was the pudgy monarch respected and feared by his subjects. He made his decisions quickly and without panic; he was both intelligent and bold in an emergency. "Go to Draxcor, commander of our bilmo forces. Instruct him, in my name, to have every ship, fully armed, in readiness to take off upon order."

"But Your Highness—resistance is futile. Our strongest weapons would serve only to further enrage men of such size. We cannot hope to—"

"Enough! They do not know what weapons we have. The display of a thousand bilmos, of ten thousand of our troops—despite the difference in size—may give them pause. It is all we *can* do—other than surrender without fighting. . . . On your way, Bogolresh!"

"At once, Highness." The scientist turned to go.

"When you complete your errand," Golbasto Gue said, "seek me out at Army Headquarters. I am meeting at once with the Military heads.

AND while Golbasto Gue was calling together a council of war, and Prince Xerbus and the two Americans were still some four hundred blustrugs from Mildendo, the slim figure of a girl, wearing the sleeveless, knee-length tunic of a Lilliputian woman, slipped through an entranceway of the royal palace and, under cover of the moonless night, ran lightly across the swath of cleared ground toward the city itself.

Elaine Purwin had found it no problem to escape from the sumptuous suite Golbasto Gue had assigned to her. True, a guard had been stationed outside her door, but he had seen fit to patrol the corridor instead of remaining in front of the door itself. Elaine had changed her purple gown for a tunic found in one of the apartment's closets, waited until the guard was at the far end of the corridor, and slipped from sight in the opposite direction.

For the better part of two hours she moved warily through Mildendo's narrow streets, purposely avoiding the city's wider avenues. The streets were unlighted, and the few citizens she encountered paid her no attention.

At last the street she was following ended at the towering stone wall that surrounded Mildendo. For several minutes she stood in the black doorway of a nearby building, straining her eyes against the night in search of possible guards. Satisfied, finally, that none was about, she stole cautiously along the wall until she reached twin gates set in the stone.

They were closed and barred; but the bar, a heavy length of wood, was within reach of her hands. After considerable tugging she was able to slide it free of one catch, and the great timber toppled to the ground.

A moment later, she was outside Mildendo's walls. For a long moment she stood there, back pressed against the stone barrier, trying to decide in which direction lay the American's camp. If she could find her former companions, she told herself, they would force the Lilliputians to restore her to her natural size. The thought that such a restoration might

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not be possible tried to enter her mind but she pushed it fearfully away.

Her experience was too limited to enable her to determine directions by night, and so she set out blindly toward the north. In her present size it might require weeks of weary wandering before she could locate her fellow Americans.

For the balance of the night she trudged through the countryside. Luckily, the night was warm and clear; and when at last the moon rose, she was able to see clearly what lay about her. Except for numerous groves of towering trees, the terrain consisted mostly of level plains, and rolling hills, some of the latter being quite high.

The moon startled her by its tremendous size, and more than anything else, it brought home to her the fact that she was no longer a normal woman in a normal world.

Near morning, she found her path barred by a vast forest that appeared to extend to the horizons on either side. She skirted its edge toward the east for several hundred yards before finding a path leading into the interior.

Elaine shuddered at the thought of entering the gloomy depths, but she set her chin resolutely and passed the first line of towering trees. The trail, however, was clearly defined and she had little difficulty in following it between the walls of vegetation.

Presently the path debouched into a wide clearing surrounded by lofty trees. For a moment the girl hesitated, then, seeing nothing threatening, came confidently into the glade.

And at that moment a number of yellow-tuniced Lilliputians emerged from behind the trees to bar her progress!

SHE whirled about to retrace her steps; but a second line of men had risen to cut off that avenue of escape. And so she remained where she was, trembling with fright as the Lilliputians formed a tight circle around her.

One, a tall slender man whose dress was that of an officer, stepped forward and spoke to her. The words were no more than gibberish to Elaine, and she shook her head to indicate that she did not understand.

"Can you speak the tongue of Goliber?" she asked.

The officer stared at her without comprehension, and spoke again in the unknown language. When she showed no sign of understanding him, he barked a brief command and two of the soldiers stepped forward and took her by the arms.

Fear washed over Elaine's mind. "Wait!" she cried, wildly. "Take me to Prince Xerbus! He will tell you who I am. I am a friend of Prince Xerbus!"

The bulk of her words must have been meaningless to the officer. But the repetition of Xerbus' name may have meant something to him, for a strange expression crossed his face, and he said a few words to those holding her.

Elaine was hustled along the path she originally had been following. Her escort treated her neither gently nor roughly, but with a business-like certainty that permitted no argument.

A few minutes later the two men and the girl entered another clearing—larger than the first—where stood a small bilmo with a broad yellow stripe painted the length of the hull. She was pushed into the cabin and one of her escorts took the controls. An instant later the little craft was in the air.

For perhaps half an hour the bilmo split the air into the northwest high above the land of Lilliput. Then the craft nosed groundward, leveled off and came to a gentle halt on the ground.

When Elaine Purwin stepped from

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the airship, she found herself in the center of an armed camp. Soldiers in yellow tunics were everywhere, and in the bright moonlight she could make out row upon row of yellow-hued tents.

Silently her two guards led her along one of the tent-lined avenues. Presently the street ended at the brink of an almost circular valley. A Lilliputian in the uniform of a high-ranking officer stopped them, now, and the three men exchanged a few words.

With the officer in the lead, Elaine, flanked by her guards, was brought over the lip of the valley. As the floor of the depression came into view, an incredulous gasp burst from her lips.

SEATED on a rude bench formed of tree boles was a man. But what a man! Even while seated, the top of his head was fully forty feet above the ground. Immense fingers, the smallest well over two feet in length, toyed with a large branch from one of the trees. He appeared to be dozing, his huge eyes half closed.

The half-uttered scream died on Elaine's lips as she understood. This frightful monstrosity *was one of the Americans who had accompanied her to Lilliput!*

But which one? Douglas? Bouchaix? Or . . . Gregg? In the moonlight she was not able, at first, to identify the lineaments of the vast face.

As the guards drew her on, the features of the half-sleeping giant grew more distinct; and with sinking heart came the realization that this monster man was her avowed enemy —Joe Gregg!

The officer raised his voice to a shout. "Quinbus Flestrin! Quinbus Flestrin!"

The tremendous body stirred slowly and the mountainous head came up. "I'm awake. Whaddayuh want?"

The booming words were like the reverberations of cannon fire. The rolling sound came back as echoes from the walls of the valley.

"We have captured a Lilliputian girl," the officer shouted, in passable English. "She speaks in the tongue of Goliber. Perhaps you would like to question her."

The Gargantuan head tilted forward as the two-foot eyes looked down at the four tiny humans near the great feet. Then a mammoth hand snaked out toward them.

Elaine, stiff with horror, watched the enormous member come slowly toward her. She was dimly aware that the officer and the two guards were edging away.

And then a wall of warm, tanned flesh closed tightly about her; there was a dizzying upward swoop as the earth fell away from beneath her and the incredible face swelled in size.

The heavy lips parted, and behind a gust of foul air came the booming beat of words.

"Not a bad-looker," commented Joe Gregg. "Too bad you never grew up! So you talk United States, hunh? Where'd you learn it?"

Elaine shook her head mutely. The monstrous fingers about her, the unbelievable head, the beat of that voice, had taken her ability to speak.

"You mean," Gregg said, deep trenches of puzzlement slashing his forehead, "that you can't talk English?"

Unconsciously his fingers tightened a trifle, and the added pressure forced a cry of protest and pain from Elaine.

"Gregg! Stop it! You're hurting me!"

Shocked disbelief broke across Joe Gregg's face. "By God!" he roared. "It's the skibbie's girl friend, Elaine Purwin! *'Miss'* Purwin to you, Gregg!

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And about five and a half *inches* of her, now! Well, whaddayuh know!"

His fingers relaxed a bit; and Elaine took a shuddering breath. "Put me down, Gregg," she shouted. "You're hurting me."

THE gunner's face was suddenly expressionless. He turned his empty hand palm up and placed the tiny figure in a seated position in its center. Elaine gasped, and clung tightly to a fold of the skin.

Gregg said, "You sure came along at the right time."

The paralyzing grip of fear began to fade from the girl's mind. "What do you mean?"

"Why, it's simple!" Gregg chuckled. "With you here, Lilliput is licked."

Elaine stared at the mountainous face as though its owner had gone mad. "What *are* you talking about?"

"It's in the bag," exulted Gregg. "You see, we—the army up there, and me—march on the capital of Lilliput shortly after dawn. We're going to capture it."

"But those soldiers *are* Lilliputians," Elaine protested.

"Naw, they're Blefuscuians. You've heard of Blefuscu, the island near Lilliput? They've hired me as the big gun of the attack. Hell, when this guy, Golbasto Gooey, sees me *and* ten thousand Blefuscuians, he's going to yell quits so fast it'll choke him!"

A chill came over Elaine. "And if he doesn't?"

"Then I'll just sort of—uh—walk on his gang!"

Anger and horror whitened her face. "Gregg! You filthy, inhuman monster! To trample on these tiny, helpless people!"

"Why not? It's war, ain't it?"

"Of course not. It would be slaughter! They wouldn't have a chance."

"That's the right kind of war," grinned the gunner. "If you're on the right side, of course!"

The revulsion in Elaine's expression was unmistakable. "Wait until Captain Douglas and Bouchaix hear about this. They'll never stand for it, Gregg. You should know that."

Gregg threw back his head and laughed until her ears ached from the noise. Elaine clung to his shaking palm and waited until he stopped.

"And that," he said at last, "is where I've got 'em by the hair. For if that nosey so-and-so and his pal try to stick in their chips, I'll show 'em what I'm holding in my hand, explain *what* it is and how far I'll throw it if they butt in. You'll see how fast that'll cool 'em down."

"No, Gregg," Elaine said confidently. "Nothing you could show them would make them let you do as you threaten. Nothing."

"No? What if the thing in my hand was *you*?"

The girl lifted a stricken hand to her lips as his meaning took shape in her mind. "You wouldn't . . ." she faltered.

"Don't worry. When Douglas finds out it'll mean your life if he interferes, he'll be good. And Bouchaix will follow his orders. The captain's so nuts about you he'd let a dozen Lilliputs be taken over rather than have your hair mussed."

The words brought a strange, breathless feeling to her, even as she argued against the statement that had brought it to life.

"That's the silliest thing you've said yet! Captain Douglas wouldn't give me a second thought, let alone fall in lo—" Her lips refused to finish the word.

"That," Gregg told her, "is where you're wrong. You didn't see his face

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when he found out you were missing from camp. He's so crazy about you that nothing else matters!"

Suddenly there rose on the still air the clear, high note of a bugle.

Joe Gregg, with Elaine still in the palm of his hand, got awkwardly to his feet.

"That's the signal, baby," he said. "We're ready to march."

"March?"

"Sure. On Mildendo—Lilliput's capital. And you're coming along—right in the pocket of my G. I. shirt!"

CHAPTER IX

Ultimatum

CAPTAIN JOHN DOUGLAS plodded up the last fifty feet to the crest of a hill and sank to a sitting position on the close-cropped grass. A moment later Drexel Bouchaix dropped down beside him and began to loosen the laces of his once sturdy shoes.

Douglas said, "You take those off, fella, and you'll never get them on again. Your feet will swell too much. We've come better than twenty miles tonight."

"We are nearly there," said a thread-like voice from his shirt pocket. "Another sixty blustrugs is all."

"Which means," mused Douglas, "about five miles." He scratched his neck thoughtfully, and looked down at Xerbus' pointed casque protruding from his pocket. "You think your father will restore Miss Purwin to her natural size, Prince? You're too nice a little guy to be a prisoner."

"Only if you also promise to do no harm to our people," was the calm response. "To protect them, he would sacrifice his own son—himself if necessary."

"We have no wish to molest the people of Lilliput," Douglas said. "All we want is the girl—as she was originally."

The sky to the east was bright with the promise of a clear day. The sun would show within another hour, Douglas decided, which would be about the time the three of them would arrive at Mildendo.

He got stiffly to his feet. "Let's go, Bouchaix, before our muscles stiffen up. Besides, Ela—Miss Purwin's probably getting fed up being less than six inches tall!"

Bouchaix, who had also risen, caught the captain by the arm and pointed to the southern sky. "Look there, Captain! Just above that grove of trees?"

Douglas narrowed his eyes. The faint light made the visibility uncertain. Finally he nodded.

"You mean that little dot?"

"Yes."

Xerbus spoke from the folds of Douglas' shirt. "One of our bilmos. Sent out to obtain your present position," he added cheerfully.

"I see. Naturally those of your party who flew back to Mildendo last night made a complete report."

"Naturally," Xerbus admitted.

"They could have saved themselves the trouble of sending out a scouting ship," Douglas said grimly. "We'll let them know we've arrived when we get there!"

BOGOLRESH, master scientist of Lilliput, approached Golbasto Gue and touched his shoulder respectfully to gain his attention.

The lords of Lilliput, called to a council of war by their king, had completed plans for the defense of Mildendo. The several commanders of Lilliput's armies and air forces were gathering together their notes on the meeting and preparing to leave.

When Bogolresh had gained His

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Majesty's ear, he bent and whispered briefly to him. Then Golbasto Gue rose to his feet, dignified, every inch a king.

"Hurgoes of Lilliput," he said briskly, "One of our bilmo scouts returned only a few moments ago. He reports the two Quinbus Flestrins are within sixty blustrugs of Mildendo, and rapidly approaching us from the northwest."

The king paused in his talk as a low buzzing seemed to emanate from the breast of his tunic. Inserting his hand within the folds of cloth he drew out a small black box on one side of which were set a microphone and several buttons. He depressed one of the latter and said, "This is His Excellency."

A sharp, metallic voice, speaking so clearly and with such urgency that the words were audible to all within the room, came from the microphone.

"Adarlu, commander of His Majesty's bilmo 2H6, reporting. Four large bilmos, carrying the yellow colors of Blefuscu, are approaching Mildendo from the north. They are still several blustrugs away."

"Dispatch your squadron to meet them," Golbasto Gue replied without hesitation. "Order them to ground a full blustrug from the city and to continue here on foot."

"At once, Excellency."

Thoughtfully, the monarch returned the communicator to its place. "Odd," he said slowly. "The Blefuscuians know it is forbidden to fly one of their ships within our boundaries. We shall all remain here until we have their reason for ignoring our laws."

Half an hour later, Golbasto Gue and his cabinet had their explanation.

In a calm, formal statement, bristling with polite expressions of dignified respect, Dorbolur, a Hurgo of Blefuscu, delivered an astounding ultimatum!

Briefly, the government of Lilliput was notified that an army of twelve thousand Blefuscuians, complete with a tremendous fleet of bilmos, lay twenty blustrugs to the north of Mildendo and ready to march on the capital; that unless articles of surrender were arranged within three hours, Lilliput would be overrun and the city itself would be taken, sacked and burned!

GOLBASTO GUE heard him out without interruption, waited until he had returned to his seat at the oval table. Then he rose, and his face was black with suppressed rage.

"Return to the commander of your forces," he said calmly. "Inform him that the armies of Lilliput will attack within the hour; that every Blefuscuian within Lilliput will be dead before sunset; that within a fortnight the island of Blefuscu will be a torn and pillaged waste. I, Golbasto Gue, have said this. Go!"

The slender, dapper Hurgo of Blefuscu rose easily from his chair, smoothed the yellow tunic he wore, saluted with careless insolence and turned to go.

Every eye in the room was on him as he reached the doorway. There he turned back to say, almost as an afterthought:

"It is the hope of my illustrious commander that bloodshed and suffering can be spared the Lilliputian forces and populace. Particularly since any resistance will be doomed to failure before it begins."

He paused, and the air of extreme satisfaction was so evident in the lines of his face, that every Lilliputian braced himself unconsciously for the impact of Dorbolur's closing words.

"In addition to the forces of my country which I have mentioned," he said, "we have enlisted the aid of a

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Quinbus Flestrin!"

The curtains at the doorway parted and closed, and Dorbolur of Blefuscu was gone.

A heavy silence hung over the council chamber. There was no man present who did not know that Lilliput's doom had been pronounced in the messenger's parting words. Solemnly they looked to the squat, puffy figure at the head of the oval table, for guidance.

And then, to the complete astonishment of his entire cabinet, Golbasto Gue threw back his head and burst into laughter! They watched him pant and gasp and shake, until their own grim faces relaxed into uncertain smiles.

"How smug he looked!" wheezed the king. "How sure he was that his last words would send us crawling to his commander for mercy! I would give half my kingdom to see his face when he learns it is Blefuscu, not Lilliput, that is finished!"

"But Your Imperial Majesty," said Bogolresh slowly, "how can we hope to win over their forces with a Man Mountain against us. What weapon will avail against such a monster?"

He had voiced the question that was in the mind of every member of the council.

Golbasto Gue snorted. "Fortunately for Lilliput her king is a man of brains! Have all of you forgotten the Woman Mountain, now shrunken and in our hands?"

The members of the cabinet showed their lack of comprehension. "If Your Highness would explain . . ." the scientist began hesitantly.

"Dolts! It should be clear to all of you. Within a few minutes I go to meet the two Man Mountains who have captured Prince Xerbus. I shall explain to them that the Woman Mountain will be restored, *on the condition they help us defeat our enemies!*"

FOR a stunned moment the men about the table sat with mouths agape. And then a dozen voices began a delighted murmur that swelled to a roar or approbation.

A guard entered the room, then, and approached the seated monarch. "The Man Mountains are outside the city gates, Your Excellency," he reported.

Golbasto Gue rapped sharply on the table. "Hurgoes! The Marcolo Valley lies fifteen blustrugs to the north of Mildendo, and directly in the path of the Blefuscuian forces. Deploy our own armies along the southern lip of that valley at once. I go now to enlist the aid of the two Man Mountains outside our gates."

As he pushed back his chair to rise, there came a sudden interruption from the doorway, and Rotarlo, the king's secretary, stumbled into the room and hurried toward his master.

"Your Highness!" he panted. "The Quinlom Flestrin! She—she—"

The monarch's hands shot out to fasten on the bent shoulders of the secretary. "What of her?" he snarled, his round face suddenly livid.

"She is gone!"

Golbasto Gue came out of his chair with a bound, and the fingers tightened their hold, shaking the frightened man until his teeth rattled.

"Gone!" he roared. "Gone where? How?"

"I—I do not know," stammered the old man. "She must have slipped from the palace during the night. The guard outside her door swears he did not leave his post during that time but I think he lies."

The heart of Golbasto Gue seemed to have gone out of his rotund figure. He released the cringing secretary and dropped wearily back into his chair.

Slowly he bowed his head, while the assembled nobles awaited his words.

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"Hurgoes," he said brokenly, "we shall give our lives in the defense of our country. Our cause is already lost but we can die as befits our position and our heritage. For this I must tell you: Lilliput is doomed!"

CHAPTER X

Battle

"SO that," Douglas said, "is Mildendo."

The two Americans were standing on the crest of a low hill overlooking a wide valley. Below, sharply detailed in the light of early dawn, lay a sprawling, diminutive city behind a nine inch wall of gray stone. Except for the central palace, no building was higher than three stories, which—to the Americans—meant about thirty inches.

"Odd," Xerbus commented from Douglas' shirt pocket, "that there is no one waiting us outside the walls. I had expected that most of Lilliput's armies would be drawn up there, at my father's command, to influence you with a display of our might."

"There's some sort of wooden platform near the main gates," observed Bouchaix, straining his eyes the better to see. "Maybe we're going to get some speeches!"

"I want more than speeches," declared Douglas grimly. "We want Elaine Purwin and we want her quick! Let's go down there."

When the two soldiers were within a hundred yards of the city's walls, the gates opened and two Lilliputians emerged. Quickly they mounted to the platform of the wooden structure, to them nearly thirty feet above the ground.

Golbasto Gue and his companion, Bogolresh, watched the two seventy-foot humans come steadily toward them. If there was anything of fear or concern within his mind, none might have guessed it from the expressionless calm of his face. Bogolresh gripped the railing about the platform with tense fingers, realizing with absent-minded surprise that his knees were trembling.

Finally the two Man Mountains were hardly more than an arm's length from the wooden tower. With a regal gesture, Golbasto Gue's hand shot up in the signal to halt.

"Quinbus Flestrins," he shouted, "what do you want of the people of Lilliput?"

John Douglas, in recognition and respect of the speaker's high office, saluted smartly.

"Mighty king of Lilliput," he said, his voice low-pitched that its volume might not make his words unintelligible to the tiny ears of his listeners, "I have come to demand the return of those two of our people whom you have reduced in size and taken as captive. In return, I offer to free your son Xerbus, who is our prisoner."

Golbasto Gue turned puzzled eyes on Bogolresh. "*Two* of them?" he whispered. "I thought there was but one—the woman."

The scientist nodded. "That is correct, Your Majesty. Ask him to explain."

The king turned back to the tremendous figures of the Americans. "First," he shouted, "I must know what you have done with my son."

Slowly Douglas's hand went to the pocket of his shirt, fumbled there for a moment, then came out toward the raised platform. In those great fingers was the motionless figure of Xerbus of Lilliput.

Golbasto Gue knew a moment of awful fear as he observed the deathlike stillness of his son's body. Before he

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could voice his panic, however, the mammoth hand gently restored the microscopic form to the folds of the same pocket.

GOLBASTO GUE set his jaw. To him were given two choices. He could attempt a monumental bluff with the attendant risk of losing everything were the deception discovered—or he could tell the truth, that the girl was missing, and still attempt to win the support of these Man Mountains to Lilliput's defense.

"O Quinbus Flestrins," he began, his voice loud and clear and completely steady, "hear my words. I must tell you that, were it possible, the Quinlom Flestrin would be restored to her natural size without delay. But—"

John Douglas felt a cold hand close on his heart. He took a slow step forward, his face twisted with sudden rage. "What do you mean—'Were it possible'?" he flared. "If you've hurt that girl, so help me God, I'll—"

"Wait!" cried Xerbus from Douglas' pocket. "Let my father finish what he is saying, O Mighty One."

"Okay, Golbasto," he said grimly. "Go on with your explanation. But it had better be good!"

Rapidly, the king explained that Elaine had escaped during the night, that all Lilliput would have been set in search for her had not a crisis arisen that first must be met: the invasion of the Blefuscuians.

Douglas interrupted him at that point. "In other words," he said, "you want us to wait for the return of the girl until you have won your war with Blefuscu."

Golbasto Gue spread his hands. "It appears that Lilliput will not win this war," he admitted sadly. "And when the enemy overruns our country and sacks our city and murders our people, the Quinlom Flestrin may fall into their hands before we can find her. I need not explain what might happen to her if that should come to pass."

The pudgy monarch had played his hand with all the skill he could muster. Without asking for help from the Quinbus Flestrins, he had cunningly planted the idea in their minds that only an alliance with the forces of Lilliput could save the girl they sought.

Douglas rubbed his chin thoughtfully. "What makes you so sure you're going to lose this war?" he asked. "I thought Lilliput was the stronger of the two countries."

"Under ordinary circumstances," said Golbasto Gue, "we would annihilate the Blefuscuians without trouble. But they enlisted the aid of a Quinbus Flestrian, and against such our armies are helpless."

"You mean a man of our size is helping them?"

"Yes."

And then a great light dawned on John Douglas. He turned to Bouchaix. "So that's what's happened to Joe Gregg," he said angrily. "He's gone and lined up with the other side. Looks like you and I'll have to step into the picture, Bouchaix. Gregg's got no business mixing in this thing."

The mechanic nodded. "I had the feeling that guy'd give us trouble sooner or later," he said.

Douglas looked down at the king. "All right, Your Majesty. We'll come in on your side. But just to make sure that you'll find the girl for us when this is over, we'll keep Xerbus, here, with us."

Sheer relief made Golbasto Gue's knees tremble slightly. "As you wish, Quinbus Flestrin."

"Okay. Now, where do we find these Blefuscuians?"

"Twenty blustrugs to the north," re-

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plied the king. "I will go ahead by bilmo and inform my commanders that you are coming to join us."

Douglas took a deep breath. "Come on, Bouchaix," he said lightly. "Let's break up this war of quarter-pints before it gets started. It shouldn't be hard to make Gregg see the light!"

THEY found the two armies entrenched behind the heights on either side of a narrow valley. As the two Americans came up to the rear of the Lilliputian lines, they were met by Golbasto Gue, his rotundity clothed in the unadorned dress of an ordinary warrior. With him was Bogolresh, resplendent as ever. Both were mounted on white horses.

"Thank Orid, you've arrived!" the monarch said warmly. "Your very appearance may cause the Blefuscuians to capitulate. If the Flestrin, Gregg, is unwilling to fight against you, they will have no other choice. Our bilmo scouts report that we have a decided edge in both men and materials."

"They may attack," Douglas commented, "before they discover that we've joined your side of the scrap."

Bogolresh shook his head at that. "Their scouts have been over our lines and the surrounding country-side since we left Mildendo. They've reported your arrival by now."

Bouchaix said, "Seems to me you've overlooked a way to cut down these Blefuscuians."

The two men of Lilliput stiffened. "What do you suggest?" Golbasto Gue asked.

"Why, this machine that you used to shrink Miss Purwin. Why not take some of your men and enlarge them to our size, say. That'd stop 'em cold."

Again Bogolresh shook his head in negation. "That we cannot do. We have the knowledge to reduce a human and to restore him to normal size. Beyond that we cannot go."

"In that case," Douglas said, "I suppose we'll have to—"

The king held up his hand suddenly, cutting off the captain's remarks. He inserted his fingers into his tunic and brought out a communicator.

Douglas' ears were nearly seventy feet above the tiny monarch, so that he heard nothing of the brief conversation that followed. Presently the king tucked the black box into its resting place and called up to the towering figures to kneel that he might address them.

"Quinbus Flestrins," he said, when they had complied, "the commander of our bilmos forces has just reported that the enemy Flestrin is moving up to the peak of the ridge across the valley from us. It is evident that he intends to approach our lines."

Douglas and Bouchaix exchanged glances. The machinist said, "Looks like the showdown, Captain."

"Yes," The officer did not appear to be greatly impressed. "You stick here, Bouchaix, while I go out and talk things over with the fool!"

"But, Captain Douglas," the other protested. "Why can't I—"

"Use your head, fella. Those boys may have some sort of weapon we know nothing about. If they get both of us together, who's going to back up our friends here? Or who'll look after the Purwin girl later on? Anyway, I think I can talk Gregg out of this crazy stunt of his."

Bouchaix was not convinced. He shrugged, said, "You're in command, sir. I must obey orders."

"That's not the idea," Douglas said shortly. "But we'll play it that way."

HE reached into his breast pocket and brought out the tiny figure of

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Prince Xerbus. Tenderly he placed the Lilliputian on the ground between the two mounted men.

"Long as I'm taking your word for things, Your Majesty," he said, grinning. "I'd just as well leave the little guy with you. He might get hurt if he went along."

Before the others could reply, he turned and started briskly up the slope toward the hill's crest. Treading cautiously he threaded his way among the bivouacked troops, seeing the awed expressions on their upturned faces. He felt curiously alone—a misfit in a normal world.

At the top of the ridge he looked into the green, smooth-surfaced valley, expecting to see Gregg moving toward the Lilliputian lines. But there was no living creature in sight.

For a moment he stood there, undecided, within clear view of the enemy behind the opposite hill. And then he saw Gregg's stocky form appear on the peak, hesitate briefly, then begin the gradual descent toward the valley floor.

His jaw grimly set, John Douglas went forth to meet him. He was conscious of thousand of tiny men lining the rim of the heights behind him as he picked his way down the incline.

THERE were deep lines in the fat cheeks of Golbasto Gue as he stood with Bogolresh and Prince Xerbus on the hilltop watching the towering figure of their champion on his way to meet the enemy.

"Isn't there something we can do to aid him," he asked hopefully. "Perhaps if we send a squadron of bilmos to dive at the other Flestrin to distract his attention until Douglas can overcome him?"

"It would be useless," Bogolresh replied. "The Blefuscuians would send their own ships to drive them away."

Prince Xerbus broke in, his face transfigured with sudden hope. "I've got it!" he exclaimed. "We *can* help him!"

Golbasto Gue grabbed him by one arm. "How?" he demanded tensely. "Name it!"

"Our degravitators! We will turn every one we have against this Flestrin Gregg. Perhaps they won't be strong enough to lift him from the ground, but certainly they should overcome his balance enough to make it easy for Douglas to handle him."

"Splendid!" roared Golbasto Gue. "We'll do it!"

He turned to Bogolresh for approval of the plan. But the middle-aged scientist was shaking his head.

"It won't do," he told them reluctantly. "Your Majesty forgets that degravitators are useless at a distance of more than a quarter-blustrug.

"We have several hundred of them, in groups of ten, scattered the length of our lines. One such unit creates a force-field strong enough to form an invisible, semi-elastic barrier that will hold back men *of our own size*.

"If we were to assemble them all at one point, and the enemy Flestrin were to come directly toward the concentration, it *might* hold him off. But if he then moved a half-blustrug to either side, they would be rendered useless. And certainly we cannot move them to the valley floor and set them up while the Flestrins battle."

JOE GREGG and Captain John Douglas reached the valley floor at almost the same time. Between them lay nearly a half mile of grass-covered ground, and slowly they moved toward its center.

While still a hundred feet away, Gregg hailed his erstwhile companion.

"Hi, Cap?" he shouted cheerfully.

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"What's the good word?"

Douglas showed no sign of having heard the greeting, but, head bent slightly forward, continued to plod ahead with slow deliberation.

Gregg took a few more steps, then halted uncertainly and waited for the other to close the gap. When Douglas was less than twenty feet away, Gregg held up his hand for him to stop.

"That's close enough, Cap," he called, his voice cold with menace. "Let's talk this over."

Douglas seemed not to have heard. He continued on without hesitation, his face expressionless.

"Hold it, damn you!" snarled the gunner. So savage was his tone, that the other abruptly stopped.

Douglas made no attempt at diplomacy. He said coldly, "As your superior officer, Gregg, I command you to inform the Blefuscuians to lay down their arms and surrender. You may inform them that only those responsible will be punished in the manner provided for by the laws—"

"Come down to earth, Douglas!" Gregg jeered nastily. "*You* can go back and tell *your* gang the same things you've been handing me. You might have been the big noise in Uncle Sam's outfit, but out here you're just a guy that's on the wrong side of the ditch!"

Douglas sighed. "All right, soldier. I hoped you'd listen to reason. But if you mean to get tough about it, I suppose I'll have to knock some sense into that bone head of yours!"

And with that he started toward the other, his fists clenched, arms held loosely at his sides.

Gregg's hand swept to the breast pocket of his khaki shirt. He said, "I wouldn't make any rash moves if I was you, Cap."

Douglas stopped, his eyes intent on what Gregg was lifting from that pocket. His first thought was that the gunner had some sort of weapon concealed there; but when he saw what the fingers contained, his blood turned cold in his veins.

It was the diminutive figure of a woman!

"Elaine!" he cried, in a sick, incredulous voice.

Gregg chuckled. "Yeah; the Jap lover. Cute, ain't she?"

Elaine Purwin, rigid with fear, felt the tremendous fingers tighten about her. The booming voices of the two seventy foot giants tore at her ears as she hung suspended in space a full sixty feet above the ground. She realized that a hostile move on Douglas' part might mean her own death, and she hung there in an agony of suspense, waiting for him to make his decision.

Like the boom of thunder to her ears came the officer's reply. "Put her down, Gregg. It's not like you to hide behind a woman's skirt."

Gregg, knowing he held the upper hand, grunted in grim amusement. "Pretty small skirt to hide behind, Cap!" His voice took on an angry note. "You'll do as I say, or by God I'll throw this little sweetheart of yours so far she'll splash when she lands!"

HEARING the threat, Elaine could bear it no longer. Death under normal, understandable conditions she might have faced bravely. But now, suspended between earth and sky, held between fingers almost the size of her entire body, blind unreasoning panic tore everything else from her mind.

"Please, John!" she screamed. "Oh God, don't let him hurt me!"

The thin, high-pitched words came to Douglas' ears like an almost inaudible note from a violin string. So intense was the terror it expressed that he felt the hair lift on his nape.

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"What do you want me to do, Gregg?" he said woodenly.

"Now that's more like it," the burly gunner said with great satisfaction. "You're going to turn around and go back to that six inch big shot who runs Lilliput and tell him it's all over. Then my boys are going to move in and finish up. Come on; get going."

He dropped the paralyzed girl negligently into his shirt-pocket as Douglas turned wearily to obey.

"And I'll be right on your heels all the way," Gregg continued mockingly, "to see that you do as you're told. The first phony move you make means your girl friend is going to be mashed!"

As he picked his way back toward the heights sheltering the forces of Golbasto Gue, John Douglas knew the bitterness of complete defeat. He realized that he could not sacrifice the life of the girl he loved to keep Lilliput from the hands of an enemy. And with that thought came the full knoweldge that he did love Elaine Purwin, loved her completely and beyond even his own honor. The thought of her in the Gargantuan hands of Joe Gregg drained from him the will to resist. His promise to defend the people of Lilliput meant nothing when the life of the girl he loved was in danger.

But afterward—what? What would be her reaction when she learned that a free people was free no longer because John Douglas, to save her life, had broken his pledged word?

The captain's indecision might have remained until it was too late for action, had not chance stepped in at that moment.

So intent was he on his thoughts that unconsciously he slowed his pace. Gregg, grown careless by the other's complete surrender, blundered against Douglas from the rear. The contact seemed to close an electrical circuit!

As the bodies of the two men came together, Douglas whirled with the speed of light. One hand shot out to close unerringly on the surprised Gregg's right wrist. There followed a sudden surge of muscles, a rapid shifting of feet—and the right arm of the gunner was twisted behind his back in a powerful hammer-lock!

So quickly had Douglas moved, that Gregg had time only to bellow a startled oath before finding himself utterly helpless.

FOR a moment the two men stood motionless. Then Gregg made a single, convulsive effort to twist away, only to cry out in agony as Douglas pushed upward on the right forearm.

"Ohhhh!" groaned the soldier. His struggles ceased. "My God, Cap, don't! You're breaking my arm!"

"Then stand still, damn you!"

Gregg, shoulders bent forward, was helpless to move a muscle. He was aware of movements behind his back, felt the touch of Douglas' chest against him. And then the captain's free hand slipped over his right shoulder and edged toward the pocket of his shirt.

He knew at once what the officer was attempting. Elaine Purwin, hope glowing in her face, was reaching up to the hand hovering above her.

And then Joe Gregg acted!

Suddenly he slashed back with his head, catching Douglas full in the nose with the crown of his skull. Simultaneously he twisted his body outward, seeking to break Douglas' hold before his own arm could be wrenched to the breaking point.

The ruse was completely successful. Dazed, the blood streaming from his battered nose, Douglas loosened his hold and fell back.

Had Joe Gregg followed up his advantage, the fight would have ended

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Gregg's hand went out as though to ward off the blow

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then and there. But so intent was the half-crazed gunner on striking his enemy where it would hurt most, that he made his second mistake.

Before the partially stunned officer could recover, Gregg had dipped his fingers into the breast pocket of his shirt and brought out the limp body of Elaine Purwin. The hand holding her swept far back, remained motionless for a brief instant, then came forward in a powerful overhand sweep.

Like a stone from a catapult, the tiny figure shot into the air above the Lilliputian lines!

"That's the end of your damn double-crossin'—"

GREGG'S shouted words of insane triumph were cut off beneath a pile-driver of human rage. Douglas, driven to madness by the horrible death of the girl he loved, had forgotten completely all his careful training in hand-to-hand fighting.

Gregg retained his balance despite the fury of the captain's charge. With surprising agility he side-stepped the blind attack and snapped a vicious right against the other's chin. Douglas spun in a half circle and fell to the ground. Gregg, a grin of satisfaction twisting his lips, aimed a savage kick at the head of the fallen man that would have snapped his neck—had it landed.

But it did not land. The sharp impact of Gregg's fist dispelled the fog from Douglas' brain and his head moved a hair's breadth ahead of the swinging shoe; his hand snaked out, caught Gregg's ankle and jerked.

The gunner, snarling like a wounded bear, fell heavily. But his heels came up as Douglas pounced, and thudded hard into the captain's chest and sending him reeling back.

The two men came together, fists swinging wildly. Gregg took two hard smashes to the face that left him gasping; but Douglas caught a looping right alongside the temple that made the valley walls revolve like a giant pinwheel.

He saw the leering, bloody, triumphant face of Elaine Purwin's murderer bearing down upon him. With all the strength of his right arm he threw his fist at that mark; felt his knuckles crumple under a grinding impact. Then white-hot agony tore into his groin, his mind tottered over the edge of a blood-red pit—and he knew no more.

CHAPTER XI

Reunion

CAPTAIN John Douglas opened his eyes, said, "Ow!" and closed them again.

A soft voice said, "How do you feel, Captain?" as though its owner wanted very much to know.

The officer's eyelids snapped apart, pain forgotten, and she stared straight into the blue-green depths of Elaine Purwin's eyes.

From the depths of his confusion he heard himself say in an awed voice, "Gosh, you're big!"

The girl began to laugh, then—laughter that was mingled relief and hysteria. "You've given us an awful scare," she managed to say finally. "You've been out of your head for almost two weeks."

"Two weeks—!" Douglas, amazed started to sit up; but a knife-blade of agony shot through his battered head and he fell back, groaning.

Instantly he felt gentle hands press against his shoulders. "You must not move, J-John. You have been very ill."

Before the loveliness of the hovering face, Douglas' eyes indicated surrender.

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He muttered, "Okay, I'll be good," shakily.

Without turning his head, he looked about him. He appeared to be lying on a pile of cloth. About him were crude walls of plywood, topped by a ceiling of the some material. The room seemed small and familiar; and even as he sought to recall why that should be so, understanding came to him.

"Why—why, this is the hut we built the day you disappeared!" he gasped. "How did I get here?"

"Golbasto Gue arranged it," Elaine told him, smiling. "You see, I thought you would receive better care where our supplies were. So the little people made a remarkable wagon-like affair within a few hours, hitched about five hundred horses to it and carted you here. It required three days to make the trip; and once we thought you were going to die before we—"

And then, in a blinding flash, the flood-gates of memory opened in John Douglas' mind. He caught the girl by one arm, and despite her frantic objections, pulled himself into a sitting position.

"But Goda'mighty, girl, why aren't you dead? I remember now. Gregg threw you damn near a Lilliputian mile almost straight up in the air. How did you—I mean, you couldn't have lived —"

ALMOST fiercely Elaine Purwin thrust him back onto his bed. "I'm not going to tell you another thing," she scolded, "unless you promise to stop jumping all over the place."

Douglas grinned wryly. "You win, nurse. But I can't figure out—"

"—why I wasn't smashed to pieces when I hit the ground after Gregg threw me. Is that it?"

"Yes. It—it's impossible that you —"

"Oh, no," she interrupted. "Not impossible. Or I wouldn't be here. You see, the Lilliputians have some sort of machines they call degravitizers. They're supposed to create a force-field in front of an advancing army that is like an invisible wall."

"Sounds screwy," Douglas grunted.

"It isn't, though—or I wouldn't be here. Anyway, the Lilliputians had these machines, in groups of ten, all along their lines. When Gregg threw me, I went spinning through the air for what, to me, seemed two hundred feet above those front lines. It was the most horrible thing I've ever experienced, and why I didn't faint is something I can't explain.

"But when one of the commanding officers of those degravitational units saw me in the air almost over his head, he snapped out an order that caused the entire battery to train their rays on me like anti-aircraft guns. When I started to fall back to earth, it seemed that someone shoved a gigantic, invisible feather bed under me. I fell slower and slower until, finally, I stopped altogether, suspended about fifty Lilliputian feet above the ground!"

"I," whispered the awed captain, "will be damned!"

"Little by little," Elaine went on," I was lowered to the earth. We saw you battling away with Gregg until both of you collapsed.

"Things happened pretty fast, after that. Bouchaix insisted that I be restored to my natural size immediately. And the Lilliputians did so—right there. It doesn't take long, you know; a matter of stringing a coil of wire around the subject and turning on the current, or whatever it is."

IT happened then. One moment she was bending over him, speaking calmly of what had occurred; the next

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she was in his arms, half laughing and half sobbing, and his lips were against her hair and her eyes and her cheeks, while he told her over and over that he loved her. And then his mouth found hers and she lay very still, there in his arms, and for one moment, or for many, the world left them.

At last she pushed him gently away and lifted trembling hands to her disarrayed hair. "John," she whispered, her cheeks aflame, "you shouldn't have done that. Or—or should you . . . ?"

Then Captain John Douglas spoke strongly and at length, until once more she was in his arms.

They came back to reality an hour later at the sound of running feet outside the hut, and drew hurriedly apart as Drexel Bouchaix burst through the doorway.

One glance at his face told them that he brought momentous news.

"Well?" snapped Douglas tensely.

The machinist was gasping for breath. "They've come!" he panted. "They're here to get us!"

"Who?" cried Elaine, alarmed. "*Who* has found us?"

"It's a—" Bouchaix began.

"*B-o-o-m-m-mm!*"

"—destroyer!" the machinist finished, when the rolling echoes began to fade. "An *American* destroyer!"

Slowly the color drained from Elaine's cheeks. "But why are they shooting?"

"A signal gun, to let us know they've arrived," Douglas explained quietly. He was standing, now, and he slipped an arm about her waist. "I think I know what's in your mind, Elaine. But you needn't worry. No one will ever know the-er-details of how we found you. . . . Bouchaix."

"Yes, sir?"

"Miss Purwin was a captive of the Japs at Tjilatjap. We rescued her when we escaped. Understand?"

Bouchaix kept his face wooden. "Perfectly, sir."

Elaine had a wild impulse to burst out laughing. How noble he was—and how greatly he must love her! He was so sure that she was an enemy agent—a traitorous American!

"Let's get down to the beach," Douglas said. "It's only proper that we be on hand for our own rescue!"

When the three Americans reached the crest of the ridge between the camp and the water, they saw a trim-lined greyhound of the sea lying a short distance off shore. A launch had already reached the beach and several uniformed men had just disembarked.

Douglas hailed them; and he, Elaine and Bouchaix ran down the slope toward the launch. A nattily attired ensign saluted briskly and thrust out his hand to the captain.

"Captain Douglas?" he asked. "And this, of course, is Miss Purwin."

Douglas' smile faded. He said, "How did you know our names?"

THE ensign grinned. "We've been looking for you for nearly two weeks. A tanker picked up a soldier named Lanceford Mudd who had been floating around on a hunk of wreckage for several days. He told the tanker's captain the whole story; it was radioed to Darwin, and we were sent out to hunt for you."

"So Mudd didn't go down, after all," Douglas said thoughtfully. He wondered if the soldier had told of Elaine's status with the Japanese forces.

"Anything you want to take with you?" asked the ensign. "If not, we'd better get out to the ship. Time is darned important these days."

"I can't think of a thing," Douglas said. "Unless we took one of the Lilliputians back as a keepsake. And I

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don't suppose any of them would want to go."

The ensign was staring at him oddly. "Lilliputians? What do you mean, sir?"

Douglas shook off his thoughts. "Nothing. Nothing at all." He turned to his two friends. "How about it? You ready to be rescued?"

"Absolutely!" Bouchaix said eagerly. And the girl nodded subdued agreement.

They were met aboard the destroyer by the commanding officer, one Lieutenant Commander Morrisey. He shook hands warmly with Douglas, then turned to congratulate the others. At sight of the girl, his face broke into a wide smile.

"Miss Purwin! Without intending to discredit your companions, I must admit that it was primarily to find you that we've been scouring the seas. Your father had to be almost forceably restrained to keep from coming after you in his own battle wagon."

" 'His own'—" began Douglas faintly.

The officer turned to him, eyebrows lifted in surprise. "Why, yes. Hasn't Miss Purwin told you who her father is?"

Douglas' eyes shifted to meet Elaine's demure gaze. She reddened a little but did not look away.

"The subject never came up," Douglas said stiffly.

"I see." Obviously the commander did *not* see. "Miss Purwin is the daughter of Captain Richard Purwin of the United States Navy!"

Douglas bowed stiffly to her. "I am honored to have been of service to you, Miss Purwin."

He turned and went below, following the young ensign who had been detailed to show him quarters.

Lieutenant Commander Morrisey stared after him with a puzzled frown. He said, "There's something here I don't understand. What's he so stiff-necked about, Miss Purwin?"

Elaine smiled. "He's had something of a shock. Men don't like to have their preconceived ideas prove false. But I'll straighten things out."

TWO hours later, Elaine Purwin and Captain John Douglas were standing together on the bridge of the destroyer, watching the line of spray as the keen bow cut apart the waters of the South Pacific. Elaine had kept her word about "straightening things out," for the man's arm was about her waist under the folds of the raincoat one of the officers had loaned her. Lilliput was lost in the waters to the southeast.

"So," Douglas was saying, "you were a prisoner like the rest of us. And that Jap general had ordered you to have breakfast with him. You'll have to admit, darling, that we had every right to suspect you."

Elaine stirred comfortably within the circle of his arm. "He was an unusual Japanese, John. It seems he had spent many years in the States, and was a great admirer of our way of life. I think that, more than anything else, he wanted to show off his command of the English language."

"But why didn't you tell me the truth when we rescued you? It would have saved you from a lot of unpleasantness."

The girl smiled. "I hated to give you the satisfaction," she admitted. "You were so ready to believe the worst of me—all of you—that I just *couldn't* try to explain away your suspicions. Not that any of you would have believed me."

"*I* would have," Douglas declared, tightening his hold.

"Not at first, you wouldn't. And certainly Gregg wouldn't. He hated—"

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Douglas stiffened with sudden recollection, and brought his fist down heavily on the rail. "By God, I *knew* I'd forgotten something. *Gregg!* What happened to Gregg?"

Elaine said, "Bouchaix and I were so concerned over getting you well again that we completely forgot about him. He's still back there on Lilliput!"

The captain caught her hand. "Come on; we've got to tell Commander Morrisey. Gregg's still a United States soldier and will have to be rescued."

They found Morrisey in his quarters, and explained matters to him.

"You're right, of course," he said, when his two visitors had finished. "We'll turn back at once."

Moments later, the lithe destroyer had reversed its course and was moving once more toward Lilliput. It was still several hours until sundown—plenty of time to make the return trip, locate the burly soldier and head for home before nightfall.

Bouchaix came on deck to join his friends. He said, "I should have thought of Gregg before we left. But with all the excitement I forgot all about him."

"I wonder how the Lilliputians managed to keep him under control after he came around," Elaine mused. "Unless you killed him with your fists, John."

"I think I can answer that," Bouchaix said slowly. "He was being placed in the center of a strand of wire. In other words, *they shrunk him!*"

THE others stared at him in awed silence. "So that's it," Douglas said at last. "Well, they'll just have to unshrink him, then."

Commander Morrisey joined them a few minutes later. "There's a squall coming up," he told them briskly, pointing to the darkening skies near the northern horizon. "You'd better go below until it's over, Miss Purwin."

The storm—heavy winds and rain—struck some twenty minutes later. The destroyer rode the mountainous seas lightly, shaking off spume and waves with easy confidence. And then, half an hour after the storm had passed and the sky was clear again, Commander Morrisey sent for the three castaways.

He opened the conversation by saying, "Captain Douglas, something has gone wrong."

"Yes, sir?" Douglas was plainly puzzled.

"Our present course," Morrisey continued, "should have brought us within sight of the island half an hour ago."

"Should have? You mean you can't find it?"

"Exactly. And since we do know how to navigate the ship, there is only one alternative: *The island must have disappeared!*"

"But—but that's not possible, Commander!" Douglas stammered.

"Then where is it? What other explanation can you give?"

For a long moment there was silence within the tiny room. Elaine and Bouchaix were completely mystified. But a peculiar expression began to supplant the puzzlement in Douglas' face.

"I think I can advance a theory, Commander Morrisey," he said slowly. "It's going to sound so incredible that you may think I've lost my mind. But then so much on that island *is* incredible. . . ."

"Well?"

Whereupon, Captain Douglas related, briefly, the adventures of the past two weeks. Morrisey heard him out in silence, although from time to time he came close to betraying outright disbelief. But the faces of the girl and the mechanic told him the army captain was telling the truth.

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When Douglas had concluded, Commander Morrisey said, very calmly, "You three are not trying to—well—kid me, are you?"

They shook their heads.

"Hmmm. Lilliput, eh?" The naval officer looked down at his hands. "I still don't understand what became of the island."

"That," said Douglas, "deserves a theory as fantastic as the existence of the Lilliputians. Let me ask you a question, Commander."

"Yes?"

"Shortly before you located the island, did you run into any bad weather?"

Morrisey looked up quickly. "Why, yes. As a matter of fact, we did. What has that—"

"Just this," interrupted Douglas. "There's one common factor in every discovery of Lilliput. *Every such discovery is preceded by a storm of some kind!*"

"What has that to do with it?"

"Have you," Douglas asked slowly, "ever heard of the fourth dimensional theory?"

THE commander stared at him in bewilderment. "The fourth dimension? Why, yes. But as far as I'm concerned it's just a wild idea that lacks any confirmation."

"We've got a confirmation now," Douglas said impressively. "My explanation—and I'd like to hear a better—is that Lilliput lies in the fourth dimension. Through some 'dimensional warp'—for want of a better term—Lilliput can be reached. And a storm seems to furnish the one link between the two dimensions.

"You found us only because a storm opened the way. When we left the island we were still in that other dimension. But the storm we encountered a short time ago put us back in our own world."

Commander Morrisey shook his head to clear the dazed expression from his eyes. He said, "All right, Captain. I'll accept your theory—unofficially, of course. However, my report will state simply that the three of you were picked up from an uncharted island; and that you were the sole survivors. I think that advisable, don't you?"

Captain John Douglas slipped an arm about Elaine Purwin's shoulders. "I think Elaine will agree with me," he said, "that your report will be entirely correct. What has already happened to us is amazing enough, without adding to it by spending the next few months under observation in some mental hospital."

The commander eyed the arm about the girl, and smiled. "I see," he said. "So it's like that?"

"Yes," Douglas replied, drawing the girl closer to him. "It's like that!"

THE END

NEW LIFE SAVER

DR. RALPH L. HUBER, a dentist of Seattle, Washington, has invented a hypodermic syringe that is going to save the lives of many fighting men throughout the war.

The syringes can be manufactured in mass production for only 1¼ cent each and thus can be thrown away after being used once. The syringes can be filled either with one of the sulfa drugs to prevent infection or a sedative to lessen the pain until help arrives. Since the syringes are sterilized at the factory, all the soldier has to do is run the swab, which has been treated with a disinfectant and is packed with each syringe, over the syringe and then inject the contents into himself. In this way a soldier can protect himself from the danger of infection for about four days in which time he should get to a doctor.

The syringes may also be used in civilian life for hay-fever sufferers, for hemorrhage stoppers, and adrenalin injections. But, they were primarily developed by Dr. Huber to help equip the best equipped fighting men in the world.

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VIGNETTES OF FAMOUS SCIENTISTS

By ALEXANDER BLADE

Von Baer

The Science of Embryology owes much of its history to this man, who is the author of the law known as Baer's Law

KARL ERNST VON BAER was a native of Esthonia, one of the western provinces of old Russia occupying a part of the southern coast of the Gulf of Finland. He was born in the year 1792. He was educated at the University of Dorpat for the medical profession, and after graduating studied anatomy at Wurtzburg. In 1817 he became an instructor at the University of Konigsberg and later professor of zoology, and director of its Anatomical Institute. In 1838 he moved to St. Petersburg, became connected with the Academy there, and remained in that city during the remainder of his life. He died in 1876.

He is recognized as one of the founders of the modern science of embryology, and was the discoverer of what is known as Baer's Law, as follows:

"The evolution of an individual of any animal form, is determined by two conditions: first, by a continuous perfecting of the animal body by means of an increasing differentiation—histological and morphological—or an increasing number and diversity of tissues and organic forms; and second, and at the same time, by the continuous transition from a more general form of the type, to one more specific."

Wilhelm His of Germany was the first writer of note on this subject. His book, which is a classic, appeared in 1885, and embodied all that had been discovered on its subject to that date, in all respects confirming the law that Baer had announced. Since then much new information has been gathered although, as subjects for investigation are naturally much more difficult to obtain than those of adults, the additions to knowledge of human embryonic life accumulate slowly. Much more is known of that phase in animals and in vegetable life.

The human period of parturition varies a few days either way from 270, or say 38½ weeks. The first stage, which has a length of about two weeks, is that of the ovum. Of it almost nothing is known except of the last three or four days. At its termination the new organism has a length of not over one-tenth of an inch, and consists of a collection of minute cells enclosed in a bladder-like covering or skin. The second stage embraces the next three weeks. During it a length of nearly a half inch is attained, and most of the principal organs come into existence, and may be located. This is called the embryonic period, and is the one which displays signs of the animal ancestry of man, such as the gill clefts and arches, the limb buds, and the beginnings of the vertebral column or back bone. Before its termination the brain has grown so rapidly that the head is as large as all the rest of the body, a feature characteristic of the human embryo only. Also the gill clefts and arches have almost disappeared, the arms have grown faster relatively than the legs, and the general outlines of the skeleton can be traced in lines of cartilage, though no bones have yet appeared.

The organism now passes into the third and final stage, called that of the foetus. In its early weeks the sex characteristics are determined. Hair begins to appear on the scalp during the fourth month, and the cartilage of the skeleton here and there is slowly changing into bone. At the beginning of this stage a weight of about five ounces, and a length of about six inches has been attained, and the human facial features are discernible.

In the following month these measurements are nearly doubled. Hair is now well developed, and also the nails on hands and feet. The sixth months' child weighs a good pound and is eleven to twelve inches long. During the seventh, weight increases to three or four pounds, and the length to thirteen to fifteen inches. If birth now occurs life is possible, for all the organs are in existence and capable of functioning, though feebly.

When the full period is reached the weight is normally from five to nine pounds, and the length from seventeen to twenty-one inches, boys weighing on an average about twelve ounces more than girls, and being four to five inches longer.

At the normal time of birth the bony skeleton is very incomplete, being still largely in the condition of cartilage. In fact the only bones entirely hardened at that time are those small ones of the internal ear. To this curious fact is due the extreme sensitiveness of infants to sound. Their earliest impressions of the astonishing world into which they have come reach them mainly through the sense of hearing. Long before the eye has learned to interpret the meaning of the inverted image it presents to the brain, the voice of the mother has become familiar and is recognized as a symbol of protection.

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Saint MULLIGAN

"Glory be!" gasped Mulligan. "Shure, and it's a halo I'm wearin'!"

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By NELSON S. BOND

IT'S not so much what a man does that matters. It's who he does it for. There are approximately seven and a half million people in Greater New York. For almost any of these, Patrolman Patrick Mulligan could have done what he did, and no more would he have earned for his efforts than a careless nod or—at most—a little cash something wherewith to bathe the esophagus. But as it was . . .

Well, it happened this way:

"FLANNERTY," read Mrs. Mulligan aloud. "Aloysius X. Benedict Flannerty, who was yestiddy permoted to Lootenant in the Traffic Squad—" She laid down the morning paper with a rustle of indignation. "So!" she said. "So!"

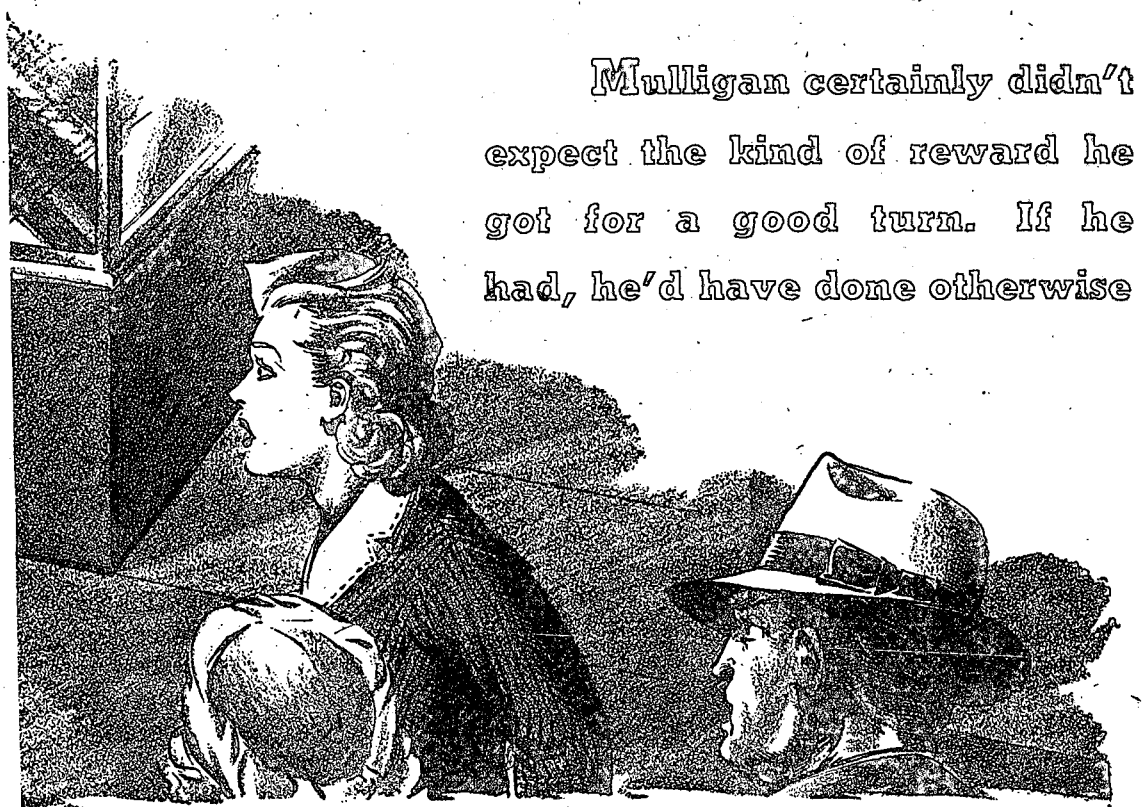
Officer Mulligan hunched diligently over his coffee. "A slice o' toast, will ye, Bridget? There's a good girl!"

"Al Flannerty!" said Mrs. Mulligan.

"It looks," frowned Pat, "like rain. The weather, I mean; not the coffee. I'll be wearin' my raincoat."

"Two years you'd been pounding a beat," said Bridget irately, "when he joined the Force. And now look at the pair of yez! You're still Patrolman Mulligan—and he's Lootenant Flannerty, with bars on his shoulders and his pixchure in the morning paper! *Arragh*, what a man I married! Me, that could have had my pick of—"

"And my rubbers as well," decided Mulligan. "'Twill likely be wet underfoot. Come to think of it, never mind the toast. I'd best be runnin'



Mulligan certainly didn't expect the kind of reward he got for a good turn. If he had, he'd have done otherwise

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along. 'Bye, mavourneen!"

And he beat a hasty retreat. But it was a strategic withdrawal in no way victorious. He knew all too well he had won but a temporary respite. By supper-time tonight, Bridget would have marshaled all the accusations, incriminations, and arguments now seething within her into one devastating attack . . . and this second time there would be no escape.

Mulligan sighed, methodically wending his way toward the busy intersection which was his traffic post. No escape—because there was no denying the rightness of Bridget's fury. He *was* a sluggard, a slow-poke, a stick-in-the-mud. He ought to be, by this time—after ten years in uniform—at least a sergeant. Instead . . .

"Good morning, Pat!" called a voice from the doorway of the Church of the Sacred Name. Pat turned and touched the peak of his cap respectfully.

"An' the top o' the mornin' to you, Father."

Father O'Rourke smiled, studying the corrugated brow of his parishioner with shrewd understanding.

"You look troubled, Patrick. Anything wrong?"

"Nothin', Father. Well, that is—" Pat decided to make a clean breast of it—"nothin' much. *I'm* okay. But my Bridget, she's sort of upset about Al Flannerty."

"Ah, yes. A fine lad. Won a promotion, didn't he?"

"That's just it, Father. Bridget says—well, maybe she's right. I've been on the force two years longer than he has, but here I am, still a plain policeman, an' he—Father, what's wrong with me? Why can't I win a permotion?"

FATHER O'ROURKE said quietly, "Now, I wouldn't worry too much about that, Pat. You do your duty, don't you?"

"That I do, sir. Or try to."

"And you're honest. There's not a police officer in the whole of New York City with a finer reputation."

"Which same I'm proud of, Father. But where does it get me? Other men get permoted over my head—"

"I shouldn't fret about that. Responsibility weighs heavily on a man's shoulders, Patrick, and too much authority is an awkward burden. The higher a man rises, the farther he has to fall. Why not be content to fill a humble post well?"

"'Tis only natural—" grumbled Mulligan.

"You'll win your reward," promised the priest, "when the time is ripe. Now, run along to work, Pat. I'll drop in on your good wife sometime this afternoon and have a bit of a chat with her. Maybe I can make her see things differently."

"Well," said Mulligan dubiously, "if you say so—"

"I do. Goodbye, my boy."

"Goodbye. And—thanks, Father."

So, with lightened heart, Patrolman Patrick Mulligan moved on down the street. With happy *camaraderie* born of ten years acquaintanceship he waved to Schneider, the butcher; to Greenstein, the tailor; to Dimitropopolous, the green-grocer; to a score of other friends and neighbors.

At precisely 7:58 a. m. he unlatched the call-box and reported on duty. At exactly 8:00 he took his post where the car-lines cross in the center of 39th Street and York Avenue. And at 8:03 . . .

At 8:03 on the dot, Patrolman Patrick Mulligan saved the life of—an angel!

NOW, strict ecclesiastics may contend that this is a contradiction in

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terms. No mere mortal, they will argue, can salvage the existence of a Being endowed, by Its very nature, with the gift of immortality.

Be that as it may; the fact remains that the angelic visitant himself acknowledged his debt to Mulligan. After he had picked himself out of the gutter into which Pat's frantic thrust had elbowed him out of the path of a ten-ton truck, he turned to Pat and said:

"Officer, I thank you! You saved my life!"

"Foosh!" said Mulligan negligently. " 'Twas nothin'. I seen the truck, an' you didn't."

"Nevertheless, it was a noble deed, nobly performed. Words alone cannot express my gratitude—"

"Look," said Mulligan impatiently. "If you're okay, say so. If you ain't tell me so's I can commandeer a car to take you to the hospital for examination. Whichever, make up your mind. While we stand here finoodlin', traffic's gettin' all snarled up."

"Perhaps," said the stranger thoughtfully, "I should tell you who I am. You don't seem to understand what a great service you have this day rendered unto a Superior Being."

"Superior— Hey, wait a minute!" interposed Mulligan suspiciously. "You ain't one o' them there Nazis, are ye?"

"Certainly not!" answered his companion with a touch of hauteur. "I, Officer—*I* am an angel!"

Mulligan squinted. Mulligan stroked his chin with a leathery paw. Mulligan mused: "I guess I'd better commandeer that car, after all. You just set down an' rest a spell—"

"And as such," said the stranger, staying him with a wave of the hand, "it lies within my ordained power to reward you with the fulfillment of any wish you might care to make." He smiled beatifically. "Well, Officer? What would you like to have? Wealth? A glorious martyrdom? Eternal life. . . .?"

"Mister," said Mulligan flatly, "I got a job o' work to do. I got no time to bandy words with the likes o' you. So, scoot along back to Bellevue, before the keepers find out you're missin'. Scram, now, before I run you in!"

The stranger smiled serenely. "Tell me, first, your wish? What do you want more than anything else?"

"There's only one thing I want," growled Pat, "and a whacky like you can't help me get it. So, beat it!"

"Say the word, my mortal friend—"

"Awright, then!" roared Pat disgustedly. "I'll tell you, if you must know. A permotion; that's what I want most! A permotion!"

"A—er—excuse me?" The sedately-dressed stranger looked puzzled. "Permotion? I'm afraid I—er—don't quite understand . . ."

"A better job," elucidated Pat. "A higher rank than I got now. What's the matter; don't you talk English?"

"Oh—I see!" The other studied Mulligan seriously. "A raise in status, eh? Mmm! Really, this is a bit awkward. I mean, that's hardly *ever* granted while the recipient lives. If you'd be willing to wait twenty or thirty years—?"

"Oh, git out o' here!" snorted Mulligan wearily. "I been waitin' ten years already, an' what've I got to show for it? Flat feet! I thought for a minute you was on the level, that maybe you had an in at Headquarters. But now—oh, beat it, will you? Before I—"

The stranger shrugged.

"Very well, Officer. A promise is a promise; a debt must be repaid. If that is what you *really* want—"

HE RAISED one arm, and Pat Mulligan gasped in alarm, suddenly

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and belatedly aware that this was no ordinary person with whom he had to deal. For in that instant the stranger's commonplace garments seemed to fade into insignificance, his visage brightened with a strange and terrible glory . . . and his lips framed a series of syllables unintelligible to Mulligan, but awesome in their majesty.

Misgivings shuddered through Pat. He cried: "Wait a minute, Mister! I was only—"

Then he fell away from his companion, blinded by the eye-searing radiance which seemed to descend from the heavens to envelope the stranger like a cloak. And from the heart of the effulgence came words:

"Thy desire is granted, O mortal! Go in peace! But beware the Antagonist, who will surely come . . ."

"—foolin'!" cried Pat. "I didn't know you m—"

He stopped abruptly, his jaw falling, and remaining, foolishly agape. For he stood not on the curb, but back upon his traffic pedestal in the middle of the intersection; about and around him swirled the flow of early morning traffic.

And the mysterious stranger—was gone!

"WELL!" said Patrolman Mulligan. "Well, I'll be!"

"Speaking to me, Officer?" asked a quiet voice.

Pat, spinning wildly, located a small, dark stranger standing beside him in the safety zone; a lean and hawk-nosed man with bright, beady eyes.

"No!" barked Pat explosively. "I was just—Get off this platform!"

"Sure—sure. No harm done," shrugged the dark man, and strolled away easily.

A thought struck Mulligan. He called:

"Hey! Hey, you—come back here a minute!"

The little man glided back as smoothly as a mop on a waxed floor. His black eyes glittered.

"Yes? Something I can do for you, Officer?"

"Nope. All I want to know is—did you see anything happen around here in the last few minutes? Anything funny?"

The lean man laughed lightly.

"*You* should know!" he said—and slipped away again. This time he had disappeared into the shuttle of moving autos before Pat could call him back.

Mulligan stared after him angrily for a moment, then forgot him as his bewildered brain took up the problem of deciding what—if anything—had really happened to him within the last few minutes. *Had* something happened, or was it just a day-dream? *Had* he saved the life of a man who claimed himself to be an angel, and *had* he with his own eyes watched the stranger disappear in a burst of radiance? Or . . .

A voice interrupted his reverie. As he pondered, he had, by force of habit, been fulfilling his duties. Allowing traffic to run with the line of his shoulders, barricading it with his back; whistling, waving motioning. Now from a taxi held in throbbing abeyance a few yards away came the voice of an old acquaintance, Licensee No. 65809, Mike Dominick.

Mike's greeting was curiously strangled.

"H-ha-lo!" he croaked. "Mulligan! H-h-ha-lo!"

"An' hello yourself!" snapped Mulligan. "What's the matter, Mike? Asthma?"

"Y-your head! Around your—*Aiee, Domine mio!*" And with a garbled moan, Mike rammed in the clutch of his jaloppy and with hectic disregard for both civic ordinances and Pat's bul-

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warking stance streaked across the avenue against the line of traffic and out of sight.

Red anger blazed in Mulligan's law-abiding heart; he grabbed for his cap, in the lining of which reposed a book of tickets and a pencil. The idea! Who did Mike Dominick think he was, anyway? The very idea of . . .

Then something cool and tingly, like an icy electric shock, thrilled the tips of Pat's groping fingers. His blunt hand skidded smoothly about the perimeter of a—a something! A hotly-cold circular something which shouldn't be . . . *couldn't* be there. But was!

For the first time in ten years of service, Mulligan deserted his station. With a cry of alarm, he charged across the street to the huge plate-glass window of Shimer Brothers, stared wildly at the image of himself reflected therein —and howled in awestruck anguish.

Dominick had voiced no greeting. The circular thing suspended a few inches above his head was a brightly gleaming halo!

NOW, it might here reasonably be argued that Patrick Mulligan was foolish to fly into a dither about a halo around his pate. There is nothing about a halo to panic a person of good character. To the contrary . . . the implications of a halo are good, rather than un-ditto.

Nevertheless, for a moment or so Mulligan completely lost his head. The explanation of this lies in the fact that Mulligan was an absolutely normal man, and nothing confuses a normal man more than to find himself suddenly confronted with an abnormal situation.

Fortunately there were, at this hour of the morning, few pedestrians on the street. And since New Yorkers have by painful practice become accustomed to such peculiarities as a pyrophile mayor and a self-avowed deity with a flair for high finance, Mulligan's appendage passed unnoticed by the handful who brushed by him, intent on their own affairs.

But Mulligan, to Mulligan, felt as conspicuous as an ermine wrap in a Sixth Avenue fur-shop. Therefore he ducked, as quickly as possible, into the murky sanctuary of the store before which he stood: *Shimer Brothers, Men's Wearing Apparel and Ready-to-Wear, Formal Attire Rented.*

"Moe!" he cried weakly. "Moe, for gosh sakes—!"

But it was not Moe Shimer who answered his call, nor was it any of the other multitudinous Shimer Brothers, all of whom were well known to Pat. The salesman who appeared was a tall, dark man with a pointed mustache and a querulous smile.

"Yes, Officer? Is there something I can do for you? A new suit, perhaps, or—"

"Who," demanded Mulligan, "are you?"

"Permit me," smiled the clerk, and handed him a card on which was neatly engraved: *"Abe Addon. Formerly associated with the Nessus Corp., Men's Custom Shirts."* "Now, sir—if I can be of any service. . . .?"

"It—" said Pat hoarsely—"it's *this!"* He pointed with trembling finger to the shimmering circle hovering above his head. In the semi-gloom of the haberdashery it dispelled an alarming amount of light. Pat waited breathlessly for Abe Addon's bleat of terror.

But the salesman's dark, saturnine countenance never changed a muscle. He just said quietly, "Yes, sir. You wish to get rid of it, sir?"

"I want to *cover* it," corrected Pat, "till I can get to Father O'Rourke an' find out what it means. Got a top hat handy?"

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"Just—cover it?" repeated the clerk. He sounded a bit disappointed. "You're sure you wouldn't like to sell it? No? Ah, well—" And he moved to a compartment. He hobbled somewhat awkwardly; he had, Pat noticed, a club foot. "A top hat. Here you are, sir. This one should fit you."

Pat removed his uniform cap and settled the silk hat firmly upon his brow. That is, he tried to. It was a trifle low. The imprisoned halo, barely fitting into the headpiece, had a tendency to float the topper from his forehead. But it would do.

Pat said, "This is fine. Thanks!" and shoved a bill into Addon's hands. He started for the door. But the clerk, moving with surprising speed, intercepted him at the doorway.

"Excuse me, Officer. Your change—"

And he held out to Pat a double handful of coins. A look of amazement overspread Mulligan's face. For an instant avidity wrestled with his customary honesty. What a mistake! There must be almost fifty dollars worth of silver. . . .

What he might have done is hard to say. Nor will it ever now be known. For at that moment the halo began buzzing and sparking like a hive of heated hornets. Pat blanched and broke for the door.

"Your mistake!" he cried. "'Twas only a five I give ye. Tell Moe I'll bring the hat back tomorrow!"

And he fled up the avenue. Behind him the new clerk faded quietly back into the murky depths of the store.

PAT knew, of course, that his pell-mell flight would attract attention. That was inevitable. A cop on the run is always worth a second look—and a *top-hatted* cop is, even to blasé New Yorkers, something of a novelty. Therefore, it did not occur to him that he was creating even more of a madhouse than he had expected until it dawned upon him that spectators were not merely staring at him and gasping; they were *running away from him and screaming!*

Now, that did not make sense! Even in his confusion Pat Mulligan retained sufficient logic to recognize that this was carrying matters a wee bit too far. His pace lagged . . . he panted for breath with which to demand an explanantion. Oddly enough, as he slowed down there reached his ears something he had not noticed before. The sound of singing voices.

"Alleluja!" these bee-thin, tinkling voices chanted. *"Alleluja! Allelu—"*

Mulligan looked up.

And moaned.

Circling above him like an iridescent covey of alate Borneo trophies was a swarm of gossamer-winged heads! It was these who, fluttering valiantly along with him in his flight, maintained that incessant piping chorus: *"Alleluja! Al—"*

"Stop it!" howled Mulligan.

The chanting died abruptly. Almost relievedly. One of the grisly little monstrosities mopped his forehead with a pin-feather and panted: "Well, now—that's more like it! We were beginning to wonder when we'd get a moment's rest—"

"Who," demanded Pat hollowly, "are you?"

"Us?" piped another of the torsoless choristers complacently. "Why, we're cherubim, of course!"

"Cheru—!"

"*Your* cherubim."

"My cheru—!" Mulligan croaked with sudden horror, identifying his companions, now, with semblances painted upon the nave ceiling.

"That's right. We're your cherubim. And Jake, over there—" The

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most loquacious of the genii bobbed his head—"he's your seraphim." He added apologetically, "Usually they appoint two, but Jake was the only one they could spare right now. Change of seasons and all that, you know; they're short of help in the Weather Department—"

"Cherubim! Seraphim!" Mulligan was glad the street was deserted. Glad, but at the same time apprehensive. That only served to further prove the fear growing upon him. "But that means I—I must be dead!"

The covey fluttered fretfully, and the spokesman bit his lip.

"That's just what *we've* been wondering about. We've decided there's something highly irregular about this canonization. You've got all the rights and privileges, but you're not dead! Of course, it's not my place to criticize—" The cherub shrugged. That is, Pat thought he did. It was rather difficult to judge, seeing as how the little ecclesiastic had no shoulders —"but *I* think there's something lousy in Limbo. Not, of course, that we won't serve you faithfully and to the best of our ability, St. Mulligan, but—"

"Saint!" gasped Pat. "Did you say *Saint* Mulligan?"

"Why, yes. Of course. Didn't you know?"

"All I know," groaned Pat, "is that I want to get to Father O'Rourke as quick as possible! I wish I was there now—*Oooops!*" A brief giddiness assailed him; he was conscious of a sensation of flight, of movement. "Hey, what's goin' on around here! What—?" "Hello, Patrick!" said a familiar voice. "This *is* a surprise. What are *you* doing here?"

Pat opened his eyes dazedly—then clamped them shut and shook his head—then opened them again. He stood in the private study of Father O'Rourke!

"SO THEN?" asked Father O'Rourke.

"I've told ye just about all," said Pat. "The grand *fee*-nale, was when I wisht I was with you, an'—*bingo!*—here I was." He stared at the priest miserably. "What am I goin' to do, Father? What is it?"

"If you were a drinking man," said the intermediary, "which I know you're not, I'd say it was alcoholic hallucinations. Which, looking at *that*—" He studied Pat's unveiled halo dubiously —"and not being a drinking man myself, I know it isn't. And you say there were cherubim, Patrick?"

"A baker's dozen of 'em," gulped Mulligan, "flittin' around me head like flies around sugar. Where they went to I don't know. But they was there."

"And a seraph?"

Pat shuddered at the memory.

"Yes, sir. Four stories high if he was an inch, an' with six pairs o' wings—"

"The description," mused Father O'Rourke, "is right. But the circumstances— This stranger, Patrick; the one whose life you saved. He called himself an angel?"

"That he did, sir. An' disappeared in a bonfire."

"Mmm-hmm. And it was immediately after he went away you discovered the halo?"

"Yes, Father."

Father O'Rourke said: "Then I'm afraid there is only one possible explanation, my son. Incredible as it may seem, he *was* an angel, and he gave you your wish."

"But—" moaned Mulligan—"but I didn't wish for to be made a saint, Father! All I asked for was a permotion—"

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"Exactly! To an angel that could mean but one thing—a promotion from mortal status to the hierarchy of sanctification. Patrick, my boy—" Father O'Rourke frowned sadly—"I warned you against ambition. 'Tis a bad mess you're in now. And the Church as well!

"A living Saint! The whole Calendar will have to be revised to include a feast day for St. Mulligan. There'll be special orders from the Diocese and a Papal investigation—"

Pat said meekly: "I might could make it go away; the halo I mean, Father."

"Go away, Patrick?"

"There was a man," explained Pat, "offered to buy it from me. A dark man with a clubbed foot, name of Abe Addon."

"Abe Addon!" cried Father O'Rourke sharply. Only he said it so fast he ran it all together. "Abaddon! Someone who called himself that offered you money? Pat—you didn't take anything from him, did you?"

"Not me, sir! 'Twas a funny thing, though. Why Moe Shimer should hire a new clerk who accepts a five-dollar bill and tries to give back eight times that much in change.

"Pat," said the priest gravely, "you've been exposed to deadly peril! I believe you're all right, else by now the halo would be gone. But to be on the safe side I'll give you a wee sprinkle with the holy water. Wait here!"

AND he hurried from the room. Mulligan stared after him curiously for a moment, then shrugged, completely at sea. Nor had he time to puzzle overlong, for at that moment came a flapping sound, and in through an open window came his winged familiars, red-faced, tousle-feathered, and chanting somewhat raggedly.

"Alleluja . . . Allelu . . . Oh, *there* you are!" grunted the foremost dourly. "A fine trick that was! Throwing a miracle and leaving us right there in the middle of the street. Next time you decide to vanish, let us know in advance, will you?"

"I will," promised St. Mulligan. "I'm sorry—"

"Well, all right. But don't let it happen again. A cherub has *some* rights. Oh—Alleluja!" appended the cherub, almost as an afterthought. He dropped to Mulligan's shoulder and rested there, fanning himself with one wing. "Anyhow, we didn't mind much," he admitted. "We had lots of fun watching the bank-robbers—"

"The what? Bank-robbers!" The auerate-circle still wreathed his head, but St. Mulligan was once again just plain Patrolman Patrick Mulligan.

"Yes. Down the street. You sure missed it. Should have seen 'em, St. M. They were smoother than the highway to Hades! Scooped up everything in sight and beat it before you could s a y 'antidisestablishmentarianism'! Not a mortal knows *yet* that they're driving smack down Fifth Avenue in a hearse! Imagine it—a hearse! Wouldn't that singe your pinions?"

"The Citizen's Second National," said Pat, "robbed!" His Irish ire was shining. "An' the criminals exscapin' in a hearse! Golly, if I could just—" Then a terrific idea hit him. "I can! Then what am I waitin' for? I—" Pat drew a deep breath—"I want to be near them bank-robbers—"

Woo-oo-oosh!

He was.

HE WAS standing on the running-board of a huge, old-fashioned, black Packard hearse which was proceeding down 5th Avenue at the modest speed demanded by decorum. The

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hearse's shades were drawn—as were the blunt-nosed automatics of the driver and his two companions on the front seat when they saw Pat. One mobster, obviously a movie-fan, gasped: "Jiggers—the Law!"

"Pull over to the curb!" commanded Pat.

"Blast him!" howled the man in the middle. "Let him have it, then step on the gas!"

He set an example by leveling his own rod at Pat and firing at point-blank range. Gouts of angry orange spat from the gun; the biting stench of cordite cut Pat's nostrils, and something like the backlash of a wayward riveting-machine hit him not once, or twice, but a half dozen times. In the head, the arm, the wish-bone—athwart the floating ribs . . .

Pat bounced from the running board to the street and landed on his southern exposure—hard! While traffic ground to a startled halt about him, he sat there dazed and stunned, waiting for the lethal dose of lead-poisoning to take effect.

Nothing happened. No pain—no rending paroxysms of bloody coughing—no visions of Aunt Nora in a trailing white nightgown . . .

He just sat there, his right hand toying idly with a tiny pebble . . .

Pebble!

He looked down.

The object in his hand was but one of the half-dozen flattened lead pellets which lay strewn about him like molars in a Golden Gloves ring!

In an instant, he was on his feet, breaking clear of the throng of eager First Aid students bearing down upon him, deadly in their earnestness and vice versa. But the escaping crooks had gained precious time. Already the speeding hearse was out of sight.

Pat groaned—t h e n remembered. This time he had his own pistol in his hand when he expressed his desire. "Back!" he voiced hoarsely. "Back alongside o' them again!"

Woo-oo-oosh!

"Pull over to the curb!" roared Officer Mulligan.

THIS time his order was obeyed. Not out of a spirit of coöperation, but because his second visitation loosed fear and panic amongst the occupants of the fleeing car. The gang leader screamed: *"Migawd! It's him again; the cop I killed!"* and fought desperately to claw his way from the enclosure *via* the thorax of his comrade-in-crime. The driver said nothing, attempted nothing. His cheeks turned the color of a mildewed diaper, his eyes rolled back in their sockets, and with quiet renunciation of all desires past and present, he went to sleep over the wheel.

The limousine hit the curb with an appalling wastage of rubber . . . tottered . . . swayed . . . and crashed over on its side. People came running More people came running. St. Mulligan rose from the wreckage, feeling strangely buoyant in his hour of triumph. A wild exhilaration suffused him, his head swam, and he felt as if he towered head and shoulders above the men rushing to his assistance.

More than head and shoulders! It seemed to Mulligan he could look down upon these poor, scurrying mortals, seeing them as tiny, scuttling ants. . . .

A voice asked: "Window-cleaner, what's the commotion about? What's going on down there?"

Mulligan turned haughtily.

"Window-cleaner!" he r e t o r t e d. "What do you mean— Oh, golly!"

For even as he spoke, the upturned, startled face of his questioner dwindled beneath him. He was eighteen

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stories high beside the Empire State Building—and still rising!

THE flutter of wings sounded above him, and Mulligan glanced up anxiously, apprehensive of pigeons. To his relief a placid voice intoned: "Alleluja! Nice work, boss!"

St. Mulligan demanded nervously, "Cherub, what's goin' on *now?* What am I doin' 'way up here?"

"Why," explained the cherub, "levitating, of course. What kind of a saint are you? Don't you know your powers?"

"I—I'm afeared not," confessed Pat. "How do I get down again? I must've pushed the wrong button, or somethin', in the excitement—"

"I'm sure," said the cherub, "I don't know. *We* have to use our wings. But since you have no wings—"

"Well, go find out!" yelled Pat in desperation. "Go ask Father O'Rourke. I'm passin' the thirty-third floor now. First thing you know, I'll be spotted by the Interceptor Command! Hurry up! Get goin'!"

"Alleluja!" said the cherub. "You're the boss." He turned to his companions. "Flight formation. Echelon right; by the flank—*fly!*" They disappeared in a flurry of trilled hosannahs.

Mulligan looked up. He was rapidly nearing the peak of Manhattan's highest structure. On the sightseers' gallery stood a lone figure. This figure cupped its hands and called to him.

"I say, there! Where are you going?"

Mulligan glowered.

"For my mornin' constitooshunul, ye consarned idiot! Stop askin' foolish questions an' lend me a hand here! Got a piece of rope in yon tower? If so, toss it over!"

The stranger smiled. A few seconds earlier, Mulligan had been a dozen stories below him; now they were almost face to face. He was a dark-complected man of medium height, with a black, waxed mustache and a tiny goatee. He called: "Rope? What do you want with a rope? Just point your nose over this way and paddle with your hands . . . There! That's it! See?"

Pat said delightedly: "W-why . . . it works!"

"Of course it does. Pull in your stomach, Mulligan. Didn't you ever hear of streamlining? Now, grab my hand. In you come—" The stranger pulled and Pat paddled; in a trice Pat was standing firmly and securely on the tower platform—"How's that? Better?"

"Much better!" acknowledged Pat, and studied the man curiously. "Say—haven't I seen you somewhere before?"

"Possibly," admitted the dark man guardedly. "I get around. Spent a lot of time in Berlin and Tokyo lately—"

"No . . . I remember now. I was thinkin' of a guy I met this mornin'. He was shorter than you, though, an' he didn't have no whiskers. Chap named Addon."

THE stranger shook his head.

"My name's Zeebub," he said. "B. L. Zeebub, at your service."

"An' mine—" Pat stopped, puzzled. "Say! You already know my name! You called me by it a few minutes ago."

"Why, of course," smiled Mr. Zeebub. "It's my business to know the names of important personages. Particularly men with—well, you might say 'unusual abilities.' You see, my hobby is collecting unusual personalities—"

"Ah, show business!" said Pat.

"You might call it that. At any rate, my reputation is based on the

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elaborateness of the spectacles I produce. I am proud to say that my establishment draws a far higher percentage of the public than does that of my—er—competitor. Yes, I've had my eye on you for some time, Mulligan. Meeting you is a great pleasure."

"Sure, now," beamed Mulligan, "an' it's very nice of you to say so. I might say the same, seein' as how everybody else I've met today has screamed an' run like they was scared out o' their wits. It's this bein' a saint that does it, you know. What with the levitatin', an' the cherubim an' seraphim yodelin' like a Major Bowes unit, an' this halo—"

He pointed to the halo apologetically. The stranger nodded understanding.

"Ah, yes. It must be very trying, Mulligan."

"All I ast for," complained Pat, "was a permotion."

"Of course. And a perfectly normal desire, too. It is a shame. I'm sorry I didn't meet you before this accident transpired. I'm sure *I* could have got you a promotion, Pat."

"You could?"

"Without a doubt. I have several old friends in the Police Department. A word to the right party, and it would be Sergeant Mulligan—perhaps even Lieutenant Mulligan, *Captain* Mulligan—who knows?"

"It would?" choked Pat raptly.

"But of course it's too late now," said the stranger regretfully. "It would hardly do for a haloed saint to be in harness blues."

Pat's house-of-cards collapsed. "No. I guess not," he agreed dully.

"Unless—" mused Mr. Zeebub, and stared at Mulligan speculatively—"unless you'd care to *dispose* of the halo and be a plain, everyday mortal again. In that case I might find a way of fixing things up—"

"You might?" Pat's round face beamed with joy. The fact that the halo was again sparking and buzzing like a hive of parboiled bees did not even disturb him. "But—but *can* I dispose of the halo? I don't know how—"

"Why, certainly. It's very simple. All you have to do is sell it to me."

"Sell it? I've give it to you!"

"No, I couldn't think of letting you do that. After all, it has a certain value. I'll give you—well, let's say thirty dollars?"

"Done!" cried Pat, and glanced over his shoulder. A sound of distant singing emanated from an approaching bevy of winged faces. "They'll be su'prised, won't they, to find out I ain't their boss no more?"

"Naturally," said Mr. Zeebub smoothly, "this isn't a one-sided bargain. You must give me something to balance the deal . . ."

"Sure . . . sure!" agreed Pat. "I'll remember you after I get my stripes!"

The dark man smiled curiously. "I'll let you know," he said, "when the time comes for me to exact my due. But it won't be for another twenty years or so, Pat. And now—your payment. Thirty silver dollars; right? And the halo—"

"Here—" said Pat, and reached for it. And gasped. And swished his hand back and forth above his head for a hoop which was not there. And turned to Mr. Zeebub in alarm. "It ain't there! It's—"

He stopped abruptly. For Mr. Zeebub, too, was gone!

"ALLELUJA!" piped the cherubim. Alleluja . . . . Here we are, boss. We got it!"

Mulligan glared at them petulantly. "Got what?"

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"From Father O'Rourke. It will stop you levitating. Here—" The cherub spokesman tilted a tiny phial, allowed a few colorless drops to trickle upon Mulligan.

"*Ao-o-oow!*" howled Mulligan. "Get that stuff off of me! What's the idea o' pourin' carbolic acid—?"

"Alleluja!" chanted the cherubim. "Allel—What did you say? Carbol—"

"You heard me. It ain't funny, pourin' red-hot acid all over a guy!"

The first cherub's smile faded suddenly. He glanced at his hushed companions, and in a troubled tone: "Let's go," he said. "We'd better get out of here!"

And away they whisked.

But even as Mulligan watched them disappear skyward, there came the scuff of many footsteps, the sound of many excited voices. The tower door opened, and Pat was engulfed by a tide of admirers. Civilians were there, and men in braided blue uniforms. Hands fought to shake that of Pat; more hands pounded his shoulders enthusiastically. A voice fraught with authority boomed loud congratulations.

". . . a fine exhibition of loyalty and courage," cried this voice, "which will not go unrewarded. For capturing the most desperate band of criminals since the days of Dillinger, you are, Patrolman Mulligan, hereby promoted to the rank of a full lieutenant. And I venture to predict, sir, that this is but the beginning of a long and successful career . . ."

Lieutenant! Lieutenant Mulligan!

Pat's brain whirled. As in a dream he found himself answering queries, accepting the praise of his peers. He was scarcely able to bid his visitors farewell, hardly aware they were leaving, until at last he stood alone again, overflowing with joy, upon the pinnacle of the Empire State Building. On the peak of man's highest mountain, overlooking the world.

The world—at his feet! And Bridget?

Pat Mulligan, saint no longer, but a lieutenant with a great and glorious future before him, laughed aloud. There was pride in his laughter. Vanity and confidence. He had no need of Mr. Zeebub now. He had won success on his own merit. Never again could Bridget rail at him, deride him.

He rocked with carefree laughter, and a lock of hair tumbled before his eyes. He raised one hand to brush it back in place . . .

And faltered, his laughter ending on a harsh note of sudden horror. The base of his spine tingled, and a writhing something brushed coldly against his legs. As his right hand fingered his forehead, his other hand groped behind him. And in that moment, Patrick Mulligan belatedly and fearfully knew not only the price he must pay for success, but the true name of his benefactor.

For what he felt was:

Horns!

Horns—and the stump of a tail!

THE IRISH MIGRATION

THE presence of many descendants of Irish folk in this country is of great importance. Many of our great men were Irish or of Irish descent; still more are making history today. Yet one wonders how come so great a proportion of the Irish live here and not in Ireland. It is well known that Irish people began to come to America in great numbers around 1848, the question is why. It is said that the main food in Ireland at that time was potatoes and at that time there was a dearth of them. How could it be that there were so few potatoes that year of 1848. It seems that a very tiny fungus known as potato blight was on the rampage, destroying all available potatoes. This terrible creature, so small and yet so mighty, is then the cause of our large Irish popoulation.

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FANTASTIC—BUT TRUE

By ALEX WAMAN

Facts such as these prove that fantasy is not confined only to fiction!

THE bright crimson colors so commonly seen in military fireworks—flares, rockets, tracer bullets—owes its quality to *strontium*. This element is derived from celestite, which is mined in the United States and, to some extent, in Mexico.

* * *

SYNTHETICALLY produced chemicals have achieved new significance in the United States since the last war. The chemical industry has advanced so rapidly, one statistician claims that a bridge of ships spanning the Atlantic Ocean, spaced just a trifle over a mile apart, would be required to bring to America but five classifications of the many vital war products developed by the industry since 1917.

* * *

RHYTHM has entered the assembly line picture again. The Du Pont Company's Finishes Division offers manufacturers an educational spray-gun program to speed production by eliminating unnecessary spray-gun shots at production line targets. The strokes of the spray-gun operators are systematized, and the operators have been called the "rhythm-makers" as a result—once they get their instruments going, they keep them swinging, steadily. All right, girls—one, two, three, spray . . . !

* * *

CHEMISTS have found that fence posts treated with chromated zinc chloride outlast untreated posts from three to ten times, protecting them from premature decay and termite attack. Woodpeckers, too, have been shown to be discouraged by the coating.

* * *

SO that they will function properly in any section of the world to which the warplane may be dispatched, engines built for use in America's fighter and bomber planes are tested to operate in temperatures ranging from 67 degrees below zero to 120 degrees above.

* * *

IF you've seen the Navy's release, "Battle of Midway," you've seen the little Jap flags painted on American planes—each symbolizing an enemy craft shot down. Knowing that victorious Yankee airmen like to paint an enemy flag on their ship for every Jap plane they bag, the San Diego Naval Air Station has begun to furnish each plane sent to the Pacific area with a packet of a dozen decalcomanias of Japan's rising sun insignia.

* * *

UNTIL recently, computing the center of gravity for loading balance of a plane required the work of a skilled mathematician. Consolidated Aircraft Corporation engineers have just perfected a gadget which permits the pilot to work fast at this calculation. The new device, known as the Bal-o-dial, takes into consideration such factors as the pilot's weight, gasoline, oil, bombs, and ammunition, enabling the pilot to make instant calculations. Modern engineers insure the safety of our boys in the air.

* * *

IF man intends to invent an inter-planetary rocket ship he had better do it within the next ten billion years, for according to Cornell University's astro-physicist, Hans Albrecht Bethe, things will be so hot for him on earth that he'll have to move to some other habitat far off in space.

Thus by the year 10,000,001,943 A.D., says Bethe, the sun will be so hot that earth's oceans will boil away; tin, lead, and zinc will melt; and nothing will live. His theory is that the sun is burning up its energy at a tremendous rate (at the rate of one cent per kilowatt hour we should have to pay a billion billion dollars to keep the sun going for a single second).

* * *

NOT to be outwitted by the modern implements of warfare Nature long ago gave birth to a beetle who resembles the Flying Fortress of World War II. This beetle is as good a pilot as any we can find and he pilots himself for miles in one day. His speed is not so great but he is persistent and needs no refueling to remain in the air. He does not worry about a gasoline shortage either, since this plane requires no gasoline.

When the enemy approach he does not fear, instead he uses some delicate but effective instruments of escape. This Flying Fortress of nature possesses a bombardier. Instead of using bombs or machine gun fire, this beetle emits a gas which knocks out his enemies.

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Rosella shrank back in utter terror . . .

Lantry wouldn't have called up this demon if he had known its identity!

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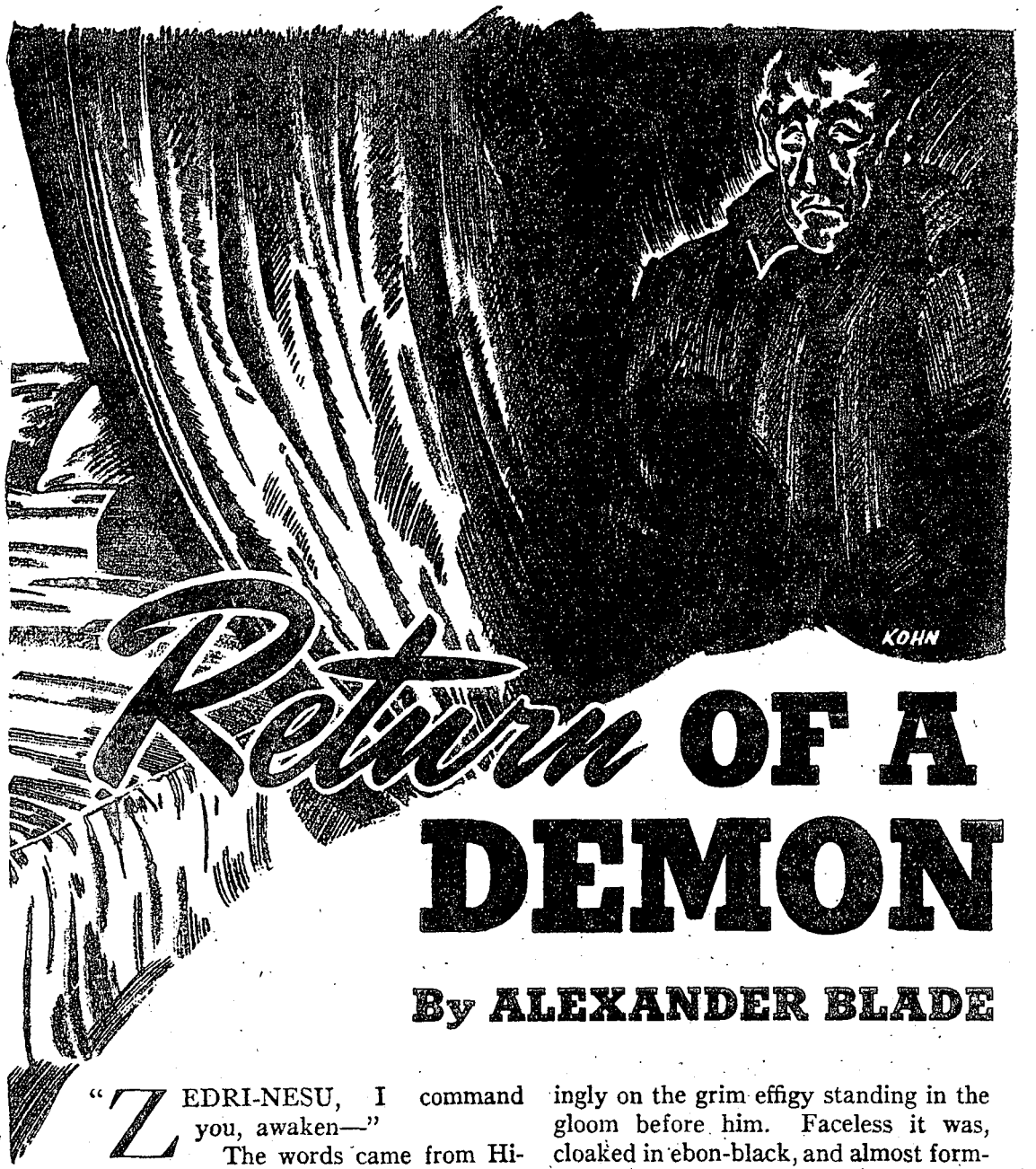

Return OF A DEMON

By ALEXANDER BLADE

"ZEDRI-NESU, I command you, awaken—"

The words came from Hilard Lantry's lips in tones of infinite weariness. He tried to hold his body erect, his palms pressing heavily on the cool leathery pages of the yellowed book before him. He peered through lids that threatened to drop over his eyeballs despite his most desperate attempts to prevent.

For an instant his gaze held waveringly on the grim effigy standing in the gloom before him. Faceless it was, cloaked in ebon-black, and almost formless. Yet it seemed partly human in an unholy way; tall, manlike—yet not a man. There was something terrifying in its alien repulsiveness, but Hilard Lantry seemed oblivious of any impression of terror. He fought only to keep his weary eyes open.

"Awake—" he croaked again, then suddenly dropped his head in tired de-

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feat. He slumped to his knees before the table on which lay the book.

For a long time he knelt there, fatigued by his desperate fight against the weariness that pressed inexorably down upon him. Then he stumbled to his feet and fought his way from the darkened room, to the hallway beyond, and finally out into the brilliant sunshine of the front porch. There he slumped down into an easy chair.

Sleep! Like a thick, black veil of cataleptic evil it cloaked his will, robbed him of volition, baffled his every physical effort. A bitter sob escaped his lips, and he cursed. How solve the problem of Zedri-Nesu if he couldn't remain awake long enough to do it?

The distant creak of wheels and clop of hoofs attracted his attention. Wearily he watched the approach of an old-fashioned buggy, drawn by a horse whose gait never varied from a methodical trot. Even from this distance he recognized the vehicle as that belonging to old Doctor Ludwig, who had treated him continually for his persistent exhaustion, an aftermath of the dread attack of sleeping-sickness that had changed the trend of his whole life.

He watched without interest because he had long since lost hope that the good doctor could do anything to help him. All Ludwig's drugs and potions had proven useless, or made his depression worse, and he had come to disdain them.

It seemed an eternity of waiting until the doctor stood before him.

"Good morning, doctor," Lantry said listlessly.

THE doctor's pale blue eyes roved keenly over every feature of his patient's lean, drawn face, noting the haggardness of the eyes, the moody set of his jaw, the lethargy of his bearing, and he shook his bearded gray-haired head in disapproval.

"Hilard, you've been doing something to yourself!" he accused. "Your condition is worse. Much worse!"

There was a flicker of animosity in Lantry's eyes as he stared up at Ludwig, but it died. "What do I care?" he flared momentarily. "I've got to do something!"

"Admitted," replied Ludwig. "But not if it is injurious. And as your physician, I forbid—"

"The only thing to which I can even partly apply my faculties!" finished Lantry bitterly.

"You mean that demonology hobby of yours?" A frown lurked in the doctor's eyes.

Lantry rose heavily, gripped his arm. "Ludwig, I've run across a book—wait 'til you see it! It's the strangest thing, and ancient! I've been translating it, and it's truly incredible—"

The momentary excitement in his voice faded, and his hand dropped wearily again. "If only I could make my brain really function!" he finished despondently. "Several passages elude me; passages that will be necessary to carry out properly—"

He halted, biting his lip.

"Hilard," Ludwig said seriously. "You aren't letting that hobby of yours get the best of you? You aren't—" he hesitated a brief instant "—you aren't beginning to believe in it?"

"Wouldn't you believe in fact?" asked Lantry.

"You don't call ancient demon books fact, do you?" Ludwig scoffed.

"Not usually," countered Lantry, "but when there's something else—something . . ."

He didn't finish, and after an embarrassing silence the old doctor pressed the subject no further. Instead he cautiously launched another.

"I met Rosella this morning," he be-

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gan. "She wants to see you."

"Rosella?" Lantry stiffened a bit and stared straight ahead.

"Yes," Ludwig went on. "Why haven't you been to see her lately?"

"It's more her fault than mine," said Lantry in subdued tones, the attitude of despair in his bearing suddenly becoming more pronounced. "She's been cooling off—changing her mind."

"I can tell you why," put in Ludwig suggestively.

Lantry glanced at him morosely. "You don't have to. I know as well as you do. And she's right, too. What girl would want to marry a—a madman! That's practically what it amounts to."

Doctor Ludwig stared pityingly at the despondent man before him.

"My boy," he said gently, "to what new depths has your depression carried you? Hilard, your condition has built up an imaginary hell for you. There could be nothing more wrong than what you have just said."

"How wrong?"

"You love Rosella, don't you?"

"More than life itself! That's what makes it so tough. And it's what makes me so sure I'm right. She's so perfect, so lovely. Everything about her makes me love her more. And using the same standards, it's inevitable that she cease to love me, if she ever did. What girl would love a mental cripple; that's what I am—a victim of incurable psychoneurosis. No wonder she shudders with horror at my presence."

He faced the doctor almost wildly. "To her I've become something unclean, something terrifying. And yet you say I'm wrong!"

"Yes," replied Ludwig calmly. "Both times."

"Both?"

"About her reason for 'cooling off' as you call it, and also about the incurableness of your condition. In fact, the last is the real reason for my visit. I'll tell you of that first."

LANTRY returned to his despondent posture, staring straight ahead.

"Go on," he shrugged. "I've lost all hope in your concoctions. None of the drugs you've given me have changed my condition a bit, except possibly to make it worse in several instances."

"This drug is different. It's a new discovery of mine. It accelerates mental processes—"

"Never mind the rest," interposed Lantry with a sudden show of interest. "I'll take the stuff, if it will do that. If it does—maybe those passages in the book . . ."

"Which brings me back to our other subject," interrupted Ludwig hastily. "The reason for Rosella's apparent coolness. She spoke to me this morning, about you, and your hobby. It's the demonology that she disapproves."

"Demonology?"

"Yes. She actually fears it, though I tried to talk her out of that silliness. However, she has a lot of the old Anglo-Saxon blood in her, and that race was notoriously superstitious. I think—"

"Anglo-Saxon!" interrupted Lantry with interest. "The book I'm translating is Druidic!"

"Druidic?" questioned Ludwig, puzzled. "The Druids left no . . ." He bit his tongue and resumed his former explanation. "I think she believes in it even more than you do, but not with your pedantic interest. Her reaction is a dual fear, of the possibility of the existence of real demons, and the effect of your studies upon your mind.

"I tried to explain to her that the reason I have not objected to your pursuance of the hobby is because it is natural for people in your condition to turn to the supernatural, the macabre,

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in keeping with their depressive mood, and also because it is imperative that you have something to interest you, to help you fight the despondency. But now, I'm afraid I'll have to do something about it. May I see that book you're talking about?"

INSIDE the house, Dr. Ludwig repressed an involuntary shudder. The funereal effect of darkly hanging draperies, exotic and weird paintings placed so that what little light there was fell at telling angles on the strangest feature of each, and the presence of odd and horribly caricatured statuary—hawk-headed Osiris, bloated Mammon, many-armed Vishnu, and others familiar to Ludwig—was instantly felt. These things had always filled him with distaste.

But now as he halted before the tall, ebon-black, hooded effigy, human in form, yet not human, an unnamable surge of utter horror coursed through him. There was something disturbingly ghastly in its featurelessness.

"This is a new one, isn't it?" he asked with a shudder he could not control. "Where on earth did you get that awful thing?"

"It's Druidic," said Lantry. "It is connected somehow with the book. I got them both together."

"Druidic?" There was a note of doubt in Ludwig's voice that escaped Lantry. "Druidic?" he repeated. With a shrug he went on, trying to be casual. "Must weigh a ton," he commented. "Made of black granite, I see?"

"It isn't stone," Lantry corrected. "And it isn't heavy. It's made of some smooth-fibered substance — a kind of wood I haven't been able to identify. It's very light. You could lift it under one arm."

Ludwig inspected it closer, noting its man-like height, its black-robed angularness, its deceptive massiveness.

"Must be very ancient," he observed suddenly. "The base of it is crumbling."

"Crumbling?" Lantry bent to inspect a ragged portion of the base. A piece seemed broken off, and on the floor was a small quantity of powdered substance. He rose to his feet, weary eyes wide for a startled instant that Dr. Ludwig failed to notice.

"Here," he said hastily, indicating the table, "is the book."

He pointed to the strange sheaf of dull brown sheets of leathery texture, covered with dark characters, and bound with woven strands of something that was hard and petrified. A low exclamation escaped Ludwig's lips as he picked it up. The book sheets were wonderfully smooth, soft, and surprisingly cold.

"Why, this thing is made of—yes—*human skin!*" he uttered incredulously. "Leather made from human skin, and bound with gut!"

"Human?" Lantry leaned forward with disbelief, startled to momentary alertness. "Are you sure?"

Ludwig nodded emphatically. "Positive. And from the texture, I'd venture to say it was a *woman's* skin!"

Lantry shook his head, oddly unwilling to believe. "That doesn't seem to fit in . . ." he muttered the unfinished sentence more to himself than to Ludwig.

"Fit in with what?" asked Ludwig sharply.

Lantry stared at him queerly, then shrugged his shoulders dully, returning to his habitual apathy of demeanor.

"According to the book," he explained in tired tones, "there came to the world a strange being who was half man, and half something else . . ."

"Represented by that statue?" hazarded Ludwig.

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"Yes. The priests took him. They raised him as a sort of demi-god and used him in their rites, at their sacrifices on the ancient altars of Stonehenge.

"Then, sacrilegiously, he fell in love with a priestess, and she with him. Their love was discovered. The priestess was sacrificed to the Druidic gods . . ."

"Demons!" corrected Ludwig.

Lantry went on, oblivious of the remark.

"Zedri-Nesu (that was his name), stricken to his very soul, sought a way to escape from the world that had now become so obnoxious to him to some unknown, unguessable place, far, yet near. He found the way—and left behind him this statue.

"However, the human strain in him still binds him in some manner to Earth, to humankind. Thus it is, says the book, that on rare occasions, Zedri-Nesu can be called to the aid of lovers in trouble who summon him with the proper rites and incantations."

Lantry ceased his summary and stood thinking moodily.

WITH quizzical thoughtfulness, the doctor fingered the deathly cold leather pages of the book and shook his head slowly. When he spoke there was decision in his voice.

"Hilard, this silly belief in the being you call Zedri-Nesu is ridiculous, besides being harmful to your condition. Undoubtedly this book is a hoax, although I'll admit a grim one. In the first place, the Druids left no books or manuscripts—"

Lantry stiffened erect, frowning. "This book is different. Zedri-Nesu wasn't a Druid. He was something extra-human. Doctor Ludwig, y o u haven't seen what I have, using these translated incantations. On two separate occasions I've achieved definite results—manifestations that can mean only one thing. But something is missing, and if I can translate two symbols whose meaning baffles me, I am convinced something will happen. I won't give up now."

"But you *are* willing to give Rosella up?" Ludwig put the alternative softly, but with telling force.

Lantry winced. "I'm afraid there's nothing I can do about that. She's giving *me* up."

"So you are grasping the insane hope that this being, this Zedri-Nesu, will come to your aid?"

Lantry reached out and took the book from Ludwg's hands. In his eyes was a momentary determination and resentment.

"Let's not discuss the subject further," he said firmly. "I'm interested now in that new mental stimulating drug you have for me."

"Oh, yes." Ludwig fumbled in his pocket, producing a box of pills. "I had forgotten for the moment. After all, I'm convinced you will not conjure up the being you call Zedri-Nesu. That's all poppycock. And if these tablets work as I anticipate they will, the need for Zedri-Nesu will be gone, because you will be cured."

The doctor placed the box in Lantry's hand and turned to go.

"Just follow the directions on the box," he advised. "One pill a day at eleven in the morning. You can take one now, to start."

At the door he turned back once more with an exclamation.

"Oh! I almost forgot to tell you. I've taken the liberty to invite Rosella to come here with me tonight, to talk things over. I'm quite sure we can come to an understanding without the help of Zedri-Nesu!"

He glanced once at the blank-

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featured statue standing grimly in the gloom, shuddered a bit, and made his way from the house.

Lantry stared in momentary dismay at his retreating back, then turned wearily to his study. Procuring a glass of water, he took one of the pills from the box and swallowed it. Then he sat down at the study table, the book of Zedri-Nesu open before him. For many moments he stared dully at the strange symbols, trying vainly to decipher one more baffling than the rest. He read them over and over, each time with more intentness. His weariness was vanishing. "These pills *are* good!" he exclaimed once.

Suddenly he sat erect, his eyes wide. "I've got it!" he shouted aloud. "I've got it! *That symbol is feminine.* No wonder my first attempts didn't work. That incantation must be spoken *by a woman!*"

Swept by a sudden jubilation and a sense of well-being and confidence, he sat with clenched fists and gleaming eyes, his mind racing. Then, with the first grin his lips had borne in months, he produced a sheet of paper and a pen and began writing swiftly in a bold, confident hand a translation of the passage of the book of Zedri-Nesu headed by the character he had just deciphered.

"Tonight, Doctor Ludwig," he uttered in a tone of challenge, "we shall find out whether or not this book is a hoax!"

THE sun sank in a dull blaze of ominous yellow, presaging the approach of a storm. The air felt curiously electrical, heavy with latent lightnings, although as yet there were no clouds on the horizon. The twilight was curiously brief, as though night hastened to erase the last trace of day.

Lantry watched the sunset from his farmhouse porch, then when it was over, entered the house and retired to the study. With a match he lit a candle, and using it as a taper, went slowly around the room, lighting dozens of other candles mounted in weirdly shaped candelabra.

One, the largest, holding nine candles grouped in a cabalistic ring, open at one end, stood before the tall, black-cloaked statue of Zedri-Nesu, now occupying a prominent position on the west wall of the room. The open end of the candle ring faced east, and in the center of the circle was a small black stone, in crude imitation of an altar.

The last candle lit, Lantry regarded the mystic circle with a strange expression on his features. His eyes roved up from the nine flames, whose light played horribly on the effigy of Zedri-Nesu, picking out high spots on its featureless face that seemed to give it the appearance of a malignant travesty on a human skull, greatly enlarged and distorted.

For an instant he felt a chill pass along his spine, but he dismissed it and turned to the study table. Opening the book of Zedri-Nesu to the page of the incantations, he laid it there in readiness.

Outside, he heard the rattle of Ludwig's buggy. Leaping to the door, he flung it wide. The candles flickered in the gusty night wind and his shadow wavered on the ground outside. It fell on the white face of Rosella coming up the walk and momentarily hid the gleam of her blond hair. In her blue eyes there was a doubtful look as she peered up at him hesitantly.

Summoning a broad grin that he found strangely easy, Lantry leaped down to clasp her in his arms. Planting a resounding kiss on her lips, he laughed with delight at her presence.

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"Oh, Hilard!" she gasped, breathless. "You've . . . changed! I'm so glad."

He laughed vibrantly, turning to Ludwig who stood behind them approvingly.

"It's the doctor's new medicine," he explained. "Made me feel like a new man already."

"I knew it would," boomed Ludwig jovially, accompanying them into the house. "But I want to warn you that the battle isn't won yet. The effects of the drug will last only about eight hours, and the depression immediately thereafter may assume an accentuated effect in reaction. You will sleep at night, which is normal, and gradually the drug will conquer the daytime apathy."

Rosella stopped at the entrance of the study and looked around with a slight frown on her delicately chiseled features.

"Oh, Hilard," she protested, "why do you make it so weird in here? It makes me shiver."

She entered, then stopped once more, a cry escaping her lips at sight of the effigy of Zedri-Nesu.

"Don't be afraid of him," said Lantry hastily. "He's new around here, but harmless; and really, he's quite a nice fellow. He has a romantic past, although tragic. I'll tell you his story a little later."

Rosella looked at Lantry, the horror in her eyes still not entirely suppressed.

"Nice?" she shuddered. "He's horrible. I'm afraid of him."

"Make yourselves at home." Uncomfortably Lantry indicated easy-chairs. "I'll go out to the kitchen and get some tea. It'll help to warm our tongues."

When he returned with a steaming pot and a tray of cups, he offered them to her. "If you will?" he queried with a smile. "I just love to see you pour tea. It makes things seem so—homelike and peaceful."

WHEN they had finished with the tea, Ludwig relaxed comfortably in his chair.

"Why not tell us the story of that ugly-looking statue," he suggested. "Maybe if we get him out of the way, he won't seem such an unwelcome guest."

Lantry glanced at the doctor in surprise, then complied.

When he had finished, Rosella shuddered.

"I still think he's horrible," she murmured. "I'm so glad he isn't alive."

Lantry and Ludwig fell suddenly silent, staring at each other. Rosella glanced at them curiously.

Ludwig, his face seeming a trifle whiter in the flickering candlelight, leaned forward a bit.

"Weren't you telling me of some sort of rites to restore this Zedri-Nesu to life?" he questioned, eyeing Lantry significantly.

For a moment Lantry returned the stare silently; then he accepted the challenge. "You're quite sure it can't be done, aren't you?" he said quietly. "Shall we try it?"

Rosella sprang to her feet. "Oh, no!" she said wildly, "please don't!"

Lantry rose also, crossing the room to grip her trembling hands in his. "There's nothing to be afraid of," he spoke earnestly. "You know I wouldn't do anything that would harm you, or even scare you?"

"Then don't do this . . ." she began.

Ludwig remained seated, but his voice broke in and compelled their attention. "Let's face the facts," he said quietly. "This situation must be settled one way or the other, and what

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better way than to carry it through, and convince ourselves? Personally I'm sure of the outcome, so I'm not afraid. But I suggest this:

"Hilard, if you are finally convinced tonight that your hobby is just a hobby and nothing else—that believing in any of it is foolish; will you promise me that you will give it up?"

Lantry stared at him. "If Zedri-Nesu doesn't appear," he agreed, "I will."

"Good!" said Ludwig heartily. "Then let's get on with the show. I for one, will enjoy it immensely. Rosella, don't shiver so. Isn't this what we came over to settle?"

Lantry squeezed Rosella's hands, leaned down and kissed her lips reassuringly, then moved swiftly. He lit a tiny incense burner, placed it before the tiny altar in the circle of candles. Then he stooped over the little square stone and pricked his finger with a needle. Rosella uttered a muffled cry as he squeezed out several drops of blood. They splashed in startling crimson contrast on the black stone.

Ludwig maintained an interested silence, but on his brows was a frown.

His preparations finished, Lantry seated himself at the study table before the book of Zedri-Nesu. He began reading in a calm, unhurried voice the translation of its incantations.

His voice sounded curiously loud in the small room, and Rosella shrank back in her chair, eyes wide as she stared at the forbidding features of the ebon statue against the opposite wall. Ludwig remained impassive as Lantry read, but he regarded his patient closely as he detected a change in the tones toward the end. Somehow they seemed less confident.

LANTRY'S voice ceased. He rose to his feet, picked up the paper on which he had written that afternoon, and crossed to Rosella.

"Read that aloud," he directed with a slight weariness evident in his tones. "It's necessary to the rite that this be spoken by a woman."

Rosella glanced at him unwillingly, then turned in panic to Ludwig.

He nodded reassuringly to her. "Go on, child, read it," he said quietly.

Trembling, she accepted the paper, and in a voice that threatened to fail her, enunciated the words.

Lantry stood before her, eyes intent on the statue of Zedri-Nesu, the tones of the incantation sounding curiously muffled in his ears. He stiffened. Were the candles in the room dimming?

He struggled to pierce the gloom that suddenly filled the room, and succeeded only as a brilliant and soundless flash of lightning glared through the windows. For an instant the voice behind him faltered, then resumed. Lantry felt the darkness growing, and in excitement, clenched his fists at his side.

A sense of enormous depression, of overhanging evil, abruptly descended upon him, and he scarcely heard the terrific crash of thunder that shook the entire house. He became aware, however, that Rosella's voice had ceased its frightened tones. Before him, the only object still visible to his weirdly obscured vision, was the statue of Zedri-Nesu. It seemed swelling, growing, becoming strangely sentient.

"It's . . . it's coming!" he gasped. Depressing terror swept numbingly over Lantry's brain.

With a growing swiftness the statue tilted beyond balance as a portion of its base crumbled, and in a silence that seemed presaged with evil, it crashed to the floor, extinguishing the candles of the mystic ring. Blackness . . . blackness that moved and surged about the

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room, flowed over him like a cold shroud.

Rosella's scream rang out, and Ludwig leaped to his feet, grasping Lantry's shoulders. He was terribly weak, and dimly welcomed the doctor's supporting arms. However, before his eyes, only one thing was visible. It shook him to the soul.

On the floor, lying in a shapeless pile of dust, all that remained of the statue of Zedri-Nesu, was a white, gleaming human skeleton, giant in stature. For a moment it lay there, then too crumbled into dust. Last to disappear was the grinning, malevolent skull.

Lantry realized with horror that the statue of Zedri-Nesu had been no statue at all, but an actual sarcophagus for a long-dead, half-human creature. Dimly, as he sank into a growing, enormously depressive darkness, Lantry heard the voice of Doctor Ludwig.

"It's the drug!" he exclaimed. "The effects have worn off. He's going to sleep!"

"Oh, Hilard!" came Rosella's distressed tones. "I knew we shouldn't have gone through with this silly rite. If this makes you any worse, I'll never forgive myself."

"Don't worry, child," came Ludwig's voice. "He's perfectly all right. It's the natural effect of the drug. At least, we've settled one argument. No amount of incantations can make an imaginary demon, benevolent or otherwise, come to life!"

Lantry was just barely conscious of being put to bed.

THE sound of frantic pounding and his name called in a hoarse voice slowly penetrated Hilard Lantry's lethargic, sleep-fogged mind. Wearily he struggled awake, forcing his body to rise from the bed. Downstairs the pounding continued, insistent, beating with some unknown terror.

Lantry slowly pulled on his trousers, then stumbled from the bedroom and down the stairs. Dully realizing that it was early dawn, he cursed the author of the infernal noise at his door. Vaguely he wondered why he felt so tremendously weak. It seemed as though his very life had been partially drained from his body by some monstrous, sucking incubus out of a nightmare. Depressive horror still clouded his brain from unremembered dreams.

The clamor at his door grew more frantic, rousing him to voice.

"I'm coming!" he called in irritation. "You needn't tear the house down!"

He reached the door, opened it to peer at the haggard face of a man he scarcely recognized as a neighboring farmer, so distorted by horror were his features.

"What's the matter?" he asked.

"My daughter," the man gasped. "She has been murdered! Her body is in your orchard!"

Lantry was shocked from his lethargy. "Murdered!" he echoed incredulously. "My God!"

The farmer babbled incoherently. "Last night . . . a scream . . . from her room. When I got there, she was gone. Outside I saw a big man all dressed in black; and he was carrying my little girl, my baby! I followed, but he was gone, as though hell had swallowed him up." Sobbing violently, the farmer bowed his head in his hands.

Lantry gripped his shoulders. "A . . . a big man in black, you say?" he asked hoarsely, something shriveling up in his breast. "Could you see his face?"

A shudder coursed through the man's shoulders. "A demon!" he uttered. "A thing from a nightmare! And he killed her. Killed her, do you hear? In your orchard!" His voice rose to a

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hysterical height.

"Wait," said Lantry in curiously dead tones. "I am coming. Just let me get dressed."

HE DRESSED, in a haste that was retarded by his usual depressive lethargy. Also, an unaccountable weakness dragging at his limbs. But in his brain was a ringing conviction.

"I have been duped by a demon. And now he is loose from his hell!"

Jaw set, he tried to force the realization from his brain, but it was futile. His hand fell on the box of pills containing the drug, and in desperate inspiration, he swallowed one hastily. Then he made his weak way back to where the farmer was standing, staring with dull, stricken horror in the direction of the orchard.

"Lead the way," Lantry directed, shivering a bit in the cool morning air as they descended the porch steps.

Automatically the farmer led him toward the clump of trees. Rain-saturated grass soaked their feet. Off to the east the sun was just appearing, casting its first rays upon the high-floating clouds still remaining from what Lantry realized must have been a heavy rain.

Suddenly the farmer halted.

"There!" he pointed, his voice low and hoarse. "I can go no further!" He dropped to his knees, sobbing.

Slowly Lantry walked forward, overpowering dread welling up in his breast. Somehow, he knew what was there, although he didn't question the knowledge. Yet, numbing shock ran through his body when he came upon the murdered girl. Just seventeen, she had barely reached womanly development, and her slim, delicately curved body lay in wet nudeness in the long grass. Lantry stared down at her a long moment, his hands and shoulders twitching convulsively in horror. Then he turned away.

"You have seen?" croaked the farmer. "None but a monster could have done such things!"

For a long moment Lantry stood before him, staring straight ahead, unseeing. In his mind's eye rose the symbol of a hitherto unfathomable character written in an ancient, dead language, on a now too significant human-skin page in a horrible book of fiction, of lies! And no longer was its meaning a mystery. He knew now the horrible portent of it, and he nodded slowly in reply.

"Yes," he agreed in strained, hoarse tones, "none but a demon, a horrible incubus come to life from the depths of hell. *And tonight, unless I stop him, he will return!*"

AWAKE! He must stay awake!

All day his brain throbbed with the necessity of it. And now, at last night had come. Two tablets of Ludwig's drug he had taken, the last just an hour ago. And already he felt the evil hovering depression that meant the wearing off of its effect. Always, as though just beyond vision, he felt the nearness of an awful presence, hallucinatory, yet material. It seemed ready to leap at him from every shadowed corner of the house. Desperately he strove to combat the lethargy stealing over him.

"I won't go to sleep!" he said haggardly. "I won't!"

But as he sat there tensely, in his study, it seemed as though a light-paralyzing darkness was stealing in upon him, dimming the electric lights blazing in every available lamp socket.

He stumbled to his feet, clutching for the table. Momentarily his vision cleared. His gaze fell upon the ominous brown of the book of Zedri-Nesu.

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From it seemed to emanate a freezing coldness that penetrated to his marrow.

Snatching it up, he crossed to the fireplace, placing it atop the prepared pile of twigs resting on the stones. He fumbled for a match, struck it, and applied it to the tinder. It flickered, smoked, and seemed reluctant to burn, as though even the flames were being sucked empty of life. But the fire persisted, under his efforts, and grew, until the flames licked more brightly upon the book.

Eagerly he watched the leather begin to shrivel and hiss as from its ancient binding a thick oil began to ooze. Smoke whirled up from the burning book in a thick cloud, filling the room. But in the growing darkness he suddenly realized the gloom was more dense than the smoke should have made it. He felt seized by an overpowering weakness. He staggered, slumped down.

Evil flowed into the room, unchecked, and a great oppression enveloped him. He found it impossible to rise, although he struggled with lethargic panic. He felt drained of his strength, and sank back into whirling darkness.

Then, as though a cool breeze had wafted through the room, the evil presence was gone. For a while Lantry lay still, while the lights brightened. Then, slowly, he staggered erect, reaching the table. Several of the tablets came to his fingers and he thrust them into his mouth.

Whirling black smoke still came from the book of Zedri-Nesu, now almost entirely consumed. As though drawn by some powerful suction, the evil, black vapor poured through the open door of the study, and out into the darkness.

Lantry, his clearing brain still whirling with that strange dizziness, realized the awful truth. Zedri-Nesu had robbed him of enough strength to again venture on a ghastly mission of murder. His scalp crawled with horror.

"Rosella!" he croaked. "It is there he has gone!"

He staggered through the open door. Whirling black vapor choked him as he fought through it, clouded brain filling with evil apathy. Once more the terrible depression gripped him, this time laden with an awful fear.

REACHING the road, he plunged through the darkness, battling against the strange lethargy. It seemed now to drag materially against his legs, as though some actual substance hindered his progress. But to his dulled brain it meant nothing. He felt hot and sweating, as though just beyond in the night existed some lightless inferno. He stumbled on, forcing his numbing body to obey the commands of his terror-filled brain.

"Rosella!" he gasped. "I must be in time to save her. I must!"

In the darkness before him, looming out of the night, he discerned the bulk of the rambling farmhouse. He made his stumbling way up to the porch, climbed the steps. Once more he felt the sensation of an awful presence.

Off in the darkness his straining ears, filled with a strange roaring that seemed to emanate from his own skull, caught eerie slobbering sounds, as though of the approach of some horrid beast, slavering for a blood-feast. But his staring eyes saw nothing.

Desperately he plunged against the door before him. It gave way with a splintering crash. Inside, all was darkness. He fumbled forward, hearing all about him macabre, panting sounds. They seemed louder as he moved, but when he whirled to confront an attack, seemed softer, almost indistinguishable, farther away.

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Moving softly as he could, he climbed the stairway toward the upper bedrooms. At the top of the landing he halted, breathing heavily, listening for the demonic sounds. Drooling evil seemed to envelop the whole house, and he could no longer determine the direction of its approach.

Filled with utter terror, he placed his back to the door of the room he knew as that of Rosella. Now let the monster come. He would fight it.

Dimly he wondered that Rosella still slept, unawakened by the crash of his forcible entry. Then the faint sound of movement beyond the panels came to his ears. She *had* been awakened!

Oddly, the only sound he could hear now was the sound of his own panting, rasping breath, sobbing through his tense lips.

The door opened behind him, sending a beam of light down the empty hallway. He whirled about, springing into the room to slam the door shut behind him. Rosella stood in a long white nightgown, her slim fingers clasped tightly to her lips; but they failed to suppress the awful scream of terror that broke from them as she shrank back.

He braced himself against the closed door, awaiting the assault he felt must come from beyond it. But there was none, and somehow, with some sleeping, suppressed portion of his brain, he knew all at once that the hallway behind him was empty of anything save darkness. Zedri-Nesu had gone—no longer followed him. He breathed a sucking sigh of relief.

And still, Rosella backed away from him, her pale features taut with terror.

"Rosella," he croaked.

From his own lips broke not her name, but an awful slobbering sound, and chill iciness swept into his brain. Using every mental power, he drew his fascinated gaze from the face of the terrified girl, downward . . . *down to a black muffling cloak that wrapped his body in a hellish self-masquerade of Zedri-Nesu.* Senses reeling, he lifted his black-gloved hands, staring through a growing red haze at the darkly clotting, newly dried blood that stained them with crimson.

A horrid slobbering, as of beastly jowls slavering for a blood-feast, filled the room . . . and ended as the door behind him opened and a pistol shot rang out.

DR. LUDWIG stared uncomprehendingly down at the body of Hilard Lantry, lying in a contorted posture on the floor of his study. Then he looked out of the window to where the red glow of flames betokened the now almost entirely consumed farmhouse of Rosella.

The farmer at his side looked at him, features ashen.

"It's *him, again!*" he gasped. "We just burned him—and her, in the other house . . ."

Ludwig shook his head slowly. "No, Hiram," he said. "What we burned over there was the real demon. This is really Hilard Lantry, his life stolen by that inhuman thing from hell . . . We will give him a Christian burial—"

"No! No!" exclaimed the farmer. "We will take no chances. Flame cleanses . . ." With a sweep, he plunged the lamp from Ludwig's hand, and flame sprayed over the room, covered the dead body of Hilary Lantry.

Ludwig staggered back, choking in thick, oily smoke. He felt Hiram's hand on his arm, and together they stumbled out of the house.

Outside, Hiram stared fearfully back, as though he expected to see an ominous, horrible black form following them.

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"Flame," he muttered. "Fire! That is more Christian than the earth . . ."

Dr. Ludwig nodded. "Perhaps you are right, Hiram. It is better that we take no chances that Zedri-Nesu ever returns."

He watched as the flames roared up, consuming even the smoke that billowed above them . . .

THE END

MEET MR. ATOM SMASHER

By AL HERMAN

WHY all the sudden interest in atom smashers? Why construct such elaborate mechanisms—at such an expense—merely to smash an insignificant atom?

In answering these questions, let it first be made clear that no atom is insignificant; it may be inconceivably small, but we must never permit ourselves to think of something small as unimportant just because of its size. Atoms make up our entire universe; it is impossible to name anything which is not composed of atoms. Therefore, nothing is too expensive that attempts to study the very structure—the very foundation of all that exists.

It is very difficult to describe the appearance of an atom, since no scientist has ever beheld this important unit of matter. By many indirect methods, however, we have some idea of what an atom would look like, if it could be seen. We no longer conceive of an atom as being a solid particle, capable of combining with other particles by virtue of valance bonds. The atom smasher has long since shown us that an atom is not the ultimate particle of matter—but is capable of further subdivisions. The atom smasher has shown the presence of electrons, protons, neutrons and positrons. Today we conceive the atom as having two important components—namely, a nucleus and its encircling rings of electrons. The electrons are in constant motion. They rotate about the positive nucleus and may jump from one orbit to another. The nucleus bears a positive charge by virtue of its protons. Every atom has as much protons as it has electrons; it is the positive charge of the protons which gives the nucleus of the atom its spell binding effect upon the revolving electrons.

The electrons themselves are very small in comparison to the proton. Each electron, however, despite its small size, bears a negative charge of electricity equal in magnitude to a corresponding proton. Since there are as many electrons as there are protons in the atom, the atom is a neutral particle. Should the atom lose an electron or gain an electron, it would then become charged; it would also develop different properties and become what scientists would call an ion.

A neutron has no charge. It has a relative mass of one, which makes it equal to the mass of a proton. Some authorities would consider a neutron as a proton stripped of its position—a position being a duplicate of an electron differing only because of its opposite charge of positive one, but the same as an electron in regards to relative mass.

There are three main types of atom smashers: the voltage doubler, the Van de Graaf generator, and the Cyclotron. Each type of smasher is interested in producing atomic bullets of such velocity that they possess the necessary force to penetrate the nucleus of an atom, and disperse some of the atomic components. The purpose of any smasher is to give these atomic bullets a tremendous striking power, for the nucleus is not easily penetrated. Atomic nuclei are heavily protected by an electrical field with which they can turn back intruders.

The best atomic bullets—the ones used in the cyclotron—are nuclei of the heavy hydrogen atom. How are these heavy hydrogen nuclei, called deuterons, given the necessary velocity they must attain in order to break an atom's defensive shield?

In the cyclotron a great electromagnet—weighing close to 85 tons—makes its appearance. The deuterons are accelerated in a vacuum chamber between the poles of this huge magnet. Two semi-circular hollow electrodes lie within the vacuum chamber and between these hollow electrodes there exists a high-frequency potential difference. The purpose of the huge electro magnets is to keep the deutrons traveling in a circular path—around from within one electrode to within the other electrode. When the deuterons cross the region between the electrodes, they are given a "kick." The deuterons, now accelerated, must still travel in a circle because of the ever present magnet, but the circle will now become larger as the deuteron gains speed.

Around and around will the deuteron go, receiving an accelerating "kick" whenever it crosses the region between the electrodes.

After a while the deuterons have been so greatly accelerated that they can be led off to bombard a substance—the deuterons now capable of an 8 million electron volt bombardment.

A cyclotron bombardment of 8 million electron volts is a powerful gun indeed. It can be used to transform certain basic elements into gold. It can be of indirect use in the treatment of various types of cancer. Used with a cloud chamber, a mechanism devised to observe the collision of charged particles, we have a valuable means of studying the greatest of all secrets—the wonderful atom.

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The IRRESISTIBLE

The gun roared just as I launched myself at Golgoth's legs

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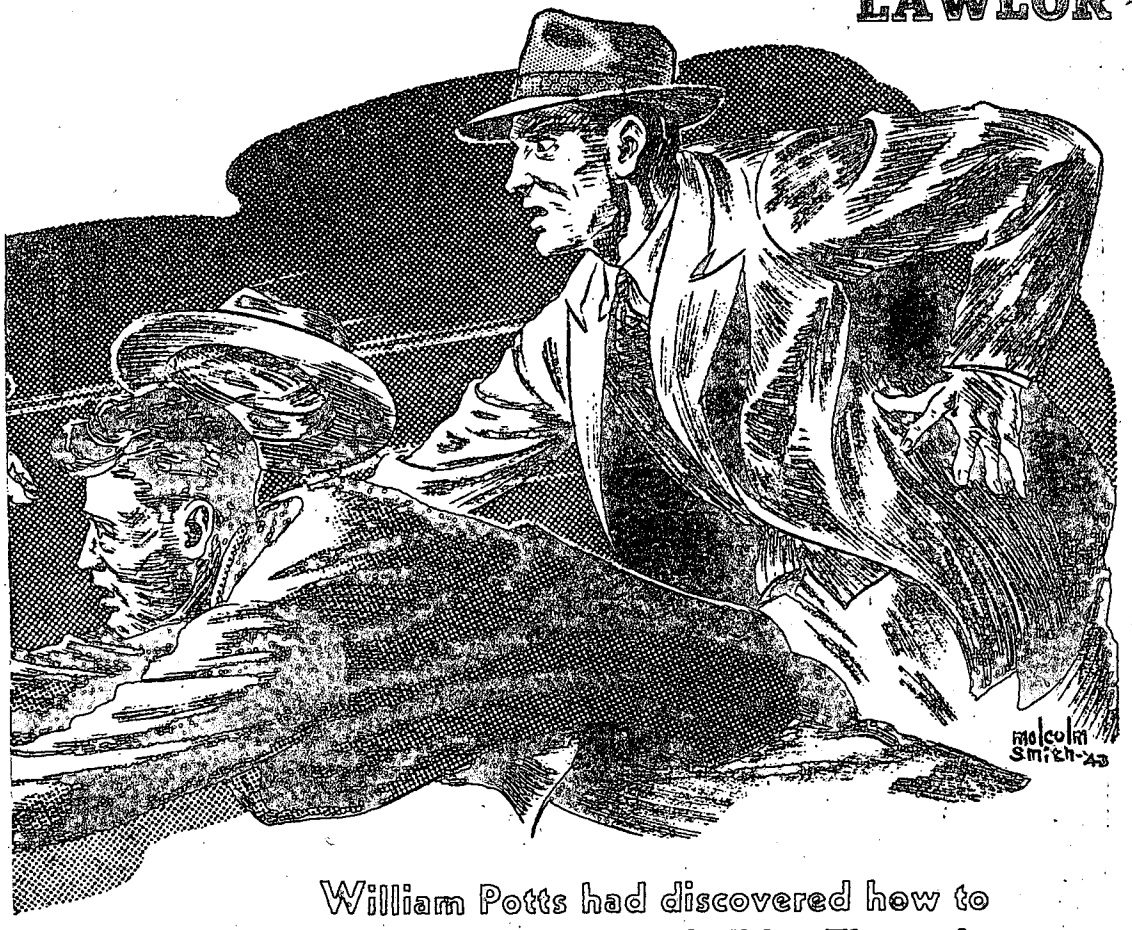
PERFUME

By HAROLD LAWLOR



William Potts had discovered how to make every woman irresistible. The only fault was that he himself wasn't affected!

I MIGHT have known that Satan would return to throw a monkey wrench into our lives. For my wife, Maribel Lee Mitchell, was ripe for mischief. And what more natural than that the First Gentleman of Hell should learn this?

Maribel, you'll recall, was at one time *premiere strip-teaseuse* of 'Scanties of '41'. Cherishing as she did memories of a more colorful past, I suppose it was inevitable that she should find marriage (even to me!) a trifle dull.

The night it began, we were driving home from a dull show and an even duller night club. Maribel leaned her red head against the back of the seat wearily, and closed her brown eyes.

"Snooks—" she began.

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"The name is Bill!" I snapped. No doubt two years of marriage had made me a trifle edgy, too.

Maribel, scenting a fight, sat up with sparkling eyes. "Since when can't I call you snooks?"

"Since right now! Do I look like a snooks? Do I act like a snooks? Well, then, don't *call* me—"

"I'll call you any damn thing I please!" Maribel crisped.

"Is zat so?" I took my eyes off the road to glare at her icily. "In common gratitude, you might remember—"

"Oh, now he's going to tell me what I owe him!" Maribel said to the air.

"—that if it wasn't for me, you'd still be nestling cozily in Hell, making life miserable for Satan."

"As a matter of fact," Maribel said frigidly, "Satan and I got along very well together. He understood me, kind of."

"Is zat so?"

"And Satan, at least, was a gentleman—"

"Is zat so?"

"—and maybe he had his faults, but at least he was never *dull,* Bill Mitchell!"

"Is zat so? Well, if Satan was such a ball of fire, I wish he'd come back and get you."

"So do I!" Maribel hurled herself to the far side of the seat. "I wish he'd come back this very minute. I bet he'd liven things up!"

We rode the rest of the way home in frozen silence.

Well, you know the old saying. *Speak of the devil . . .*

SO, THEN, it was really our own fault, when we reached home, that we found Satan himself flat on his back on our sofa. He had a highball in one hand, and was dreamily listening to the strains of Beethoven's Fifth from our Capehart. He leaped to his feet, though, when he saw our faces in the doorway, and his spear-tipped tail described excited arcs.

"Maribel! Bill! Come in, come in," he greeted us warmly. "Have a seat. Let me mix you a highball, do!"

That in itself will give you some measure of the man's urbanity. For it was our chairs, our liquor, he was offering us so debonairly.

Bending over Maribel's hand, he murmured, "My dear, you're lovelier, more glamorous, than ever!"

Personally I thought his remark a trifle fulsome. But Maribel threw me a look that plainly said, "See?"

It wasn't until Satan sank back in the sofa again that we noticed he was looking rather off his feed. His dark good looks were haggard, his hands hung limply between his spread knees. Even his faultlessly tailored evening clothes seemed to need pressing.

"Is anything the matter, Satan darling?" Maribel cooed with disgusting solicitude.

"She wants to know, is anything the matter?" Satan repeated to me with fine irony. He stared at us moodily. "Just my professional reputation is at stake, that's all that's the matter."

Maribel was all sympathy at once. She sat down on a footstool and wrapped her arms around her shapely knees. "Go on, tell us. Maybe we can help."

But I watched Satan warily with a jaundiced eye, and my nose detected something rotten in Denmark. It wouldn't surprise me at all to learn that he was up to some devilment.

"Well, it's like this," Satan began. "When I tempt somebody, I almost always succeed." He held up a deprecating hand. "Don't think I'm boasting, mind you! After all, it's not to my credit . . . I've had thousands of years

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of experience. True, some people may resist at first but, as I said, eventually I have my way."

But now his face darkened. He jumped to his feet and began to pace the room, his tail twitching angrily.

"At least, I've always had my way till now. But now . . . I tell you it's damnable that a man should live who can resist me! I'm the laughing-stock of all Hell! Do you know what Lucrezia Borgia had the temerity to say to me?"

"I can't imagine," Maribel breathed.

"What?" I asked, interested in spite of myself.

"She said—" Satan choked, but went on bravely, "She said, 'Toots, I think you must be growing old'! To me, she said it! And all because I can't get to first-base tempting this man."

Maribel cocked an eyebrow at me, and turned to Satan. "Well, who is this remarkable guy, anyway?"

"Potts, his name is," Satan snarled. "William Makepeace Potts."

MARIBEL broke into hysterical giggles. I had to laugh myself.

"I know," Satan said sadly. "To think that anybody by the name of—" He shuddered delicately, and sank back on the sofa. "He's a professor of chemistry and inventor of the perfumometer, a device for measuring the intensity of smells."

The look of interest in Maribel's eyes faded. "Oh, well, no wonder you couldn't succeed. An old man—"

"That's just it, he's not old!" Satan cut through her words excitedly. "He's only twenty-eight. But, raised by two maiden aunts, he's afraid of girls and doesn't go near them. He doesn't smoke. He doesn't drink. He doesn't—"

"Well, for heaven's sake, what *does* he do?" Maribel asked, appalled.

"He does nothing. He sits in his laboratory and mixes things. I ask you . . . who could succeed with a case like that?"

Satan threw himself down on the sofa despondently. I didn't like the reflective look in Maribel's eyes. Besides, the smell from Denmark was getting definitely stronger. Determined to bring things to a head, I cleared my throat.

"And so . . . ?" I prompted.

Satan looked from me to Maribel. "And so I thought, 'Who could possibly aid me? Who could possibly succeed where I have failed? Who made Hell too hot to hold her? Why, Mrs. Bill Mitchell—Maribel Lee, that was'."

And he beamed at Maribel.

So there. It was out. And Satan, I reflected grimly, must think I have a hole in my head. I folded my arms.

"Did you just hear that loud noise?" I asked. "Well, that was my foot being put down. Firmly. In other words, my dear Satan, *no.*"

But I'd reckoned without Maribel. She came over and grasped my lapels, and looked up into my face.

"Bill, I want to. I'm tired making like a lady. I've been so bored with everything."

"No."

She whispered for my ear alone. "We won't really harm this fellow, Potts. Of course not. We'll just show him what he's been missing. Satan will go to Hell with an easy mind—"

"And we'll go to Hell in a wheelbarrow. I know you."

"Pretty please, Bill."

"No."

"Oh, come on now, stingy guts!"

"No."

Maribel played her final, winning card. Her lower lip trembled. She squeezed a big fat tear out of her left eye.

"You don't love me any more," she

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said pathetically.

Now I may look like a gorilla, but I got a heart could be stirred with a spoon. That bright tear sliding along parallel to Maribel's pert upturned nose reproached me silently.

"Oh, all right then. Have it your way," I said sourly.

At which Satan smiled diabolically. I could have pasted him one.

WE TOOK a cab to Professor Potts' laboratory on the outskirts of town. I tried to pay the cabbie, but Satan would have none of it.

"This is on me," he said largely. And absent-mindedly his tail dipped into his pocket, withdrew a bill, and extended it to the driver.

"Wahoo!" the driver yelped. And the cab vanished down the street like a bat out of hell.

"What ailed the man?" Satan asked me fretfully.

I pointed. "Offhand, I'd say your tail gave him quite a turn."

Satan looked down at the bill clutched in his spear-tipped caudal appendage. "Good heavens, how forgetful of me!"

Maribel and I turned our backs while he stuffed his tail inside his pants. Then we moved up the flagstone walk toward the laboratory. Just as we reached it, the door was flung open and a tall blond young man rushed out.

"I've done it! I've done it! I've done it!" he cried excitedly. For a minute he stared at us with glazed eyes, and then with a little moan he fainted and slid to the ground at our feet.

Satan prodded the fellow's athletic body gently with his ebony stick. "And there," he said, "you have Professor William Makepeace Potts. You can take over from here on out. And remember, Maribel, I'm counting on you. You, too, Bill. Soften the lad up . . . make him human . . . and then, ah, then we shall see if Satan cannot tempt him!"

He bowed politely to us both, and vanished in a little puff of smoke. Barring a slight odor of brimstone, you'd never have known he'd been there.

MARIBEL broke the silence. "He's very good-looking, isn't he?"

"Who, Satan?"

"No. Potts. Which makes it easier."

"Easier?" I queried. "You mean you have something in mind?"

Maribel nodded her head importantly. "Yes, I—"

The professor stirred slightly. He was coming to. I bent down, and Maribel helped me lift him. His blue eyes opened.

"Hungry," he whispered. "I was so interested in my experiment that I didn't go out for food since breakfast."

"Ssssh!" Maribel soothed him. "You'll be all right, Professor Potts. We'll soon see that you're married."

"Married?" Potts was suddenly wide awake.

"Married?" I echoed. It's sometimes difficult to follow Maribel's thought-processes.

She glared at me now. "Certainly, married," she said, as if I were very dumb. "The plan, you know. If marriage doesn't set him on the road to ruin, nothing will."

"Who are we going to marry him to?" I asked practically.

The professor's handsome pan had been zig-zagging back and forth between us like a spectator's at a tennis match. The expression of bafflement he was wearing now turned to alarm.

"I tell you I don't want to get married!" he said. "I'm hungry, that's all that's wrong with me!"

"There's *plenty* of things wrong with you," Maribel wagged a finger at him archly. "But we'll fix you up, Pottsy."

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"Pottsy!" the professor breathed. But he was evidently too weak to do anything about it.

"We better feed him first," I said now. "You can't expect the guy to get married on an empty stomach."

Professor Potts began feebly, "I tell you I don't *want*—"

We ignored him.

It was Maribel who remembered seeing a hamburger shop, a block or so away, as we drove here with Satan in the cab. We started off, flanking Professor Potts on either side.

It was Maribel, also, who took care of the introductions. "This is my husband, Bill Mitchell, Professor Potts. And I'm Maribel Lee. Perhaps you saw my Red Garter number in the 'Scanties of '41'?"

Professor Potts seemed to have resigned himself to whatever weird fate this was that was gripping him. He looked at Maribel numbly, his handsome, ascetic face a blank.

"Red Garter? Scanties?"

Maribel looked at me, disappointed. "I guess he didn't see it."

"Probably not," I said. "If he did, he'd never forget it."

At the undeniable truth of this, she brightened.

My curiosity was bothering me. "When you came running out of the laboratory, Potts," I said, "you were yelling, 'I've done it!' Done what?"

THE professor straightened a little, as if recalling this to his memory had given him added strength. He said proudly, "I've concocted a new perfume of remarkable strength. It's so potent, in fact, that I could hardly believe my eyes when I saw its strength registered on the perfumometer."

"But what are its commercial possibilities?" I inquired, a little puzzled. "I shouldn't think women would like strong perfume."

"Certainly not!" Maribel agreed.

The professor looked at us loftily. "I'm not interested in its commercial aspects. My interest in *women* is even less." (This last was for Maribel's benefit, I was sure.) "I merely used perfume," he went on, "because it was easily obtainable. It's the method, not the result, in which I am interested."

"I don't get it," Maribel said.

Neither did I.

But Professor Potts explained, "I shall turn my findings over to others. They will adapt the method, and apply it to something other than perfume, no doubt. Something that will serve humanity in a more useful capacity."

"Still," Maribel said rather wistfully, "maybe if this perfume is as powerful as you say, it might make a woman irresistible to any man."

I started to speak. There was no sense letting Maribel get any ideas. But before I could open my mouth, Professor Potts answered, "Undoubtedly it would," he said. "But I fail to see what purpose would be served. It is my considered opinion that women cause trouble enough as it is."

And he gave Maribel an unpleasant look. Luckily we had reached the door of the hamburger shop by then, so I pushed her inside before she could answer him hotly.

THE shop's sole attendant was a young lady leaning languidly against the counter, a pancake turner in her hand. She was remarkably pretty, I noted in passing, with amber hair and gold-flecked brown eyes. But there was more than a hint of sullenness about the mouth which was a trifle alarming.

Professor Potts chirked up at the prospect of food. He even essayed a little joke. "I could eat a horse."

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The beauty behind the counter patted back a yawn. "Sorry, we're fresh out of horses."

Maribel explained kindly, "He doesn't *really* want to eat a horse. He's just joking, kind of."

The waitress favored Potts with a suspicious glance. "Oh, a joker, huh? A wise-guy, huh? Well, if he's a comedian, why don't I laugh?"

"My dear young lady—" Potts began.

"Shut up!" she said.

Thinking to smooth her ruffled feathers I glared at Potts. "Cut out the wise-cracks, Potts, or I'll—"

The waitress turned on me savagely, with one of those inexplicable changes of mood so common to women. "Who asked you to horn in? If a good-looking guy wants to tell me a joke, what's it to you, stupid?"

"Say—" Maribel began dangerously, half-rising. I thought we were in for a good old-fashioned four-cornered brawl. But suddenly the angry expression on Maribel's face faded to be replaced with one of surprised expectancy. She went on curiously, "How come you're sticking up for Pottsy, here?"

The waitress slammed three wimpies down on plates. "Maybe I like his looks. Maybe I think he's an all right guy, see?"

Professor Potts' face was a study in mixed emotions. But Maribel's was transfigured as she turned and whispered to me, "We've found her!"

"Who?"

"The future Mrs. Potts, dope!"

I whispered cautiously, "I don't think Potts wants to get married."

"Never mind what he wants," Maribel said grandly. "Who's running this, him or me?"

She went into a whispered huddle with the waitress. When she'd finished, Maribel turned to me again. She was ecstatic.

"She's willing! She says she's sick of hamburgers, corny jokes, and passes, passes, passes. She'd marry Potts in a minute. And guess what her name is? Chotsy! Imagine knowing someone named Chotsy Potts!"

"What's all this whispering about?" Professor Potts asked testily. He'd been watching the three of us with wary eyes for some time, the while he munched hamburgers.

Even I thought it was about time for Maribel to return to sanity. Or as close to it as it was possible for her to get.

"Maybe Chotsy likes him," I told Maribel, "but you're forgetting something. Does *he* like *her*?"

"It doesn't matter if he doesn't," Maribel said loftily. "I know a way to fix it."

"Another plan!" I groaned.

But Maribel had the bit in her teeth now. Her brown eyes were shining, her red curls bouncing.

Chotsy was smiling invitingly at Professor Potts, and he was running a finger around his collar nervously. Poor guy, he didn't know what it was all about.

"Now, here's what you do," Maribel said to me. "Take Potts to our house, and keep him there."

"Where are you going?" I asked suspiciously.

"We'll be right back." Maribel grabbed the arm of Chotsy, who had already doffed her apron, unveiling a shapely figure in a pink silk dress.

Professor Potts forgot his air of detachment, and stared after the vision in pink. I thought I detected a faint gleam far back in his eyes. I hid a smile.

"See anything green?" I asked pleasantly.

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At which Professor Potts blushed violently.

WELL, Potts didn't want to go to my house, but I—uh—persuaded him. We were there perhaps thirty minutes when Maribel came back with Chotsy. Those thirty minutes were pretty trying, filled as they were with high-flown rhetoric from Potts anent my high-handed tactics, my wife's insanity, and our combined general air of brigandry.

Once I attempted to stem the tide. "We're helping out Satan," I explained.

Potts sneered, "I can well believe it!"

Funny, I hadn't thought he would.

The minute Maribel and Chotsy came in the door I sensed something unusual was up, from the light of suppressed excitement in their eyes. They just stood there inside the living room door, and looked at us expectantly.

And then it happened!

You won't believe it, but suddenly I smelled the most delightful aroma ever to assail my nostrils. This delectable scent seemed to emanate from Chotsy. More, *it was drawing me to her!*

I could feel myself lifted from the sofa! I could feel myself drawn forward, irresistibly, toward Chotsy!

I could hear Maribel calling urgently, "Bill, what's the matter with you? Where are you going?"

"I'm going to Chotsy," I said. The grim determination in my voice surprised even me.

"Bill!"

"I can't help it, Maribel!"

"Bill!" There was a dangerous note in Maribel's voice now. "Stop in your tracks, or I'll hang one on you!"

"I can't!" I cried desperately.

Chotsy was standing transfixed before me. That incredibly beautiful odor was luring me on. It seemed to have assumed control of my motor reflexes. I was powerless. I *couldn't* stop!

Maribel did the only thing possible. Quick-wittedly, she picked up a lamp and hurled it with unerring aim. With a soft *klukk!* it caught me smartly on the side of the head.

I went out like a match in a high wind.

WHEN I came to, Maribel was standing above me, wringing her hands remorsefully.

"Darling, I'm so sorry! I only meant to stun you."

"Stun me?" I groaned. "You like to ruined me!" I tried to sit up, but couldn't. "What the—?"

With great presence of mind, Maribel had tied me to the sofa with the tow-rope from the garage. I looked around. Potts had sunk into a chair. He was quite evidently thunderstruck at the quick pace events had taken. But it was Chotsy who really caught my attention.

She too was sitting in a chair. Her eyes were almost glazed. She was saying over and over again, deliriously, "It works! It really does, Maribel. Your own husband won't keep away from me."

"Oh, yes, he will," Maribel promised grimly. "If I have to nail him to the floor."

I shuddered, knowing she was quite capable of it. My head was aching abominably.

"Will someone please tell me," I asked, somewhat peevishly, "what it is that works? What ails me, anyway?"

Maribel sat down on the edge of the sofa beside me. "It's the irresistible perfume Pottsy invented. I swiped it from the laboratory."

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"*You* swiped it?"

"Sure I did . . . it wasn't my fairy godmother," Maribel said flippantly.

But I noticed she wasn't so lost to shame that she could meet my eyes.

There was an outraged bleat from Professor Potts. He stood up. "Good heavens, you didn't put that stuff on Chotsy? It doesn't come off. It stays on forever!"

Chotsy was beaming happily. "Who cares?"

But something was definitely wrong. After a minute's thought I had it. "Hey, but look, Maribel. You put that stuff on Chotsy to draw Potts to her, didn't you?"

"Certainly. That was the plan."

"Then," I pointed out triumphantly, "why is he standing there, like a bump on a log? Why doesn't he go to her?"

THERE was a second's stunned silence. The happy smile left Chotsy's face. Maribel looked deflated, for once in her life, but she quickly recovered.

She said coaxingly, "Pottsy, you want to go to Chotsy, don't you?"

Potts folded his arms. "Certainly not!"

"Potts, you smell something, don't you?" Maribel went on anxiously.

"I don't smell a thing," Potts drawled, prolonging the vowels unpleasantly.

It was obvious he knew he held the whip hand at last.

"I can't understand it," Maribel said, defeated.

Chotsy stood up, a despondent light in her eye. "Gee, kids, maybe the perfume doesn't work after all."

"I can smell it," I said. "I *still* want to go to Chotsy."

"I can smell it, too," Maribel said. "Though I have to admit I have no particular yen to go to Chotsy's arms. Say!" She eyed me in sudden suspicion. "Are you sure you can't resist it, or are you just trying to put something over on me?"

It was natural the perfume should attract only men. But before I could point this out, Chotsy threw her arms around Professor Potts' neck.

"Darn it," she wailed, "I'm nuts about you. You're the only man I ever met who didn't chase me. You're different, that's what."

And pulling his head down to hers, she kissed him, putting quite a bit of steam behind it. When she released him, Maribel and I watched with considerable interest the play of emotion on his ascetic face. Bewilderment first, then conjecture, finally horror. With a gasp, he turned and ran for the door. And vanished from our sight.

Chotsy sighed. "Goodbye, Maribel. Goodbye, Bill. You did what you could. I guess the perfume just isn't any good, that's all."

And, sadly, she too turned and left, leaving Maribel and me staring blankly at each other.

WE THOUGHT that was the end of the thing, of course. But the very next morning, Maribel and I were in for a surprise. I drove her to the store, and when we came out of the A & P we heard what sounded like the thundering herd.

"Must be a parade," I remember Maribel said.

But it wasn't.

It was Chotsy.

Chotsy, going by at a dog-trot. And there must have been five, six hundred men loping after her. We stared, our jaws ajar. She saw us but she didn't stop.

"Hey!" she panted breathlessly. "It works. The perfume, I mean."

Oddly enough, instead of appearing

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gratified, she looked worried as hell.

"Hey!" her voice floated back. "You've got to get me out of this."

And then I caught a whiff of ineffable fragrance. With a helpless groan, I started after. But Maribel grabbed me, and caught my nose between her thumb and forefinger.

"Hold your breath!" she commanded sharply.

I couldn't do much else, what with the death-grip she had on my smeller. We stood there until Chotsy and her followers turned a corner and vanished from our sight. Maribel released her grip on my nose then, and I rubbed the organ tenderly.

"Well, what do you know about that?" I said.

Maribel was listening to the faint sounds of the mob, now growing distant. "What bothers me," she said thoughtfully, "is how come Potts could resist her."

We just couldn't figure it out.

When we reached home, Professor Potts was sitting on our doorstep. His handsome face was haggard, but he let us lead him into the house.

"Maribel," he began, "I want to ask your advice. You seem to be a woman of experience—"

"Well, I get around some," Maribel admitted modestly.

"Then I wish you'd tell me something. Last night when Chotsy kissed me, I felt kind of funny."

Maribel sat up straight. "What do you mean, funny?"

Professor Potts' face twisted with his effort to put his sensations into words. "Well, the tips of my fingers went numb. And my throat went dry. And there were hot and cold flashes going up and down my spine, and—"

"You mean you felt all over iggly?" Maribel cried.

"Iggly!" Potts pounced on the word. "That's it, exactly! But what was the matter with me? What does it mean?"

Maribel went over and patted his arm gently. "It means, Pottsy darling, that you're in love. In love with Chotsy."

The light that dawned on Potts' face then was truly beautiful. And so was the glance of dog-like gratitude he bent on Maribel. "I believe you're right," he breathed in awe. "I believe you're right."

"Of course I'm right," Maribel assured him. "Now all we have to do is get in touch with Chotsy."

But this was easier said than done. Chotsy had seemingly vanished from the face of the earth.

THERE was an hiatus of several weeks before the next sensation.

It looked very much as if America were going to lose the war!

Editorials screamed. The Home Guard was called out. Berlin and Tokio radios babbled hysterically of the amazing news that had seeped through from the States.

Men were walking out of war production factories in droves!

There was no explanation for it. One minute the men were turning out planes, tanks, shells, equipment of all kinds; the next they were quietly laying down their tools and vanishing.

No trace could be found of the missing men!"

Men from the Federal Bureau of Investigation were in town. It was rumored that suspicion pointed to a grossly fat man named Golgoth, long suspected of subversive activities. But the FBI could get nothing definite on him.

It wasn't reasonable, anyway, everyone said, that one man could make hundreds forget their duty to their country and vanish into thin air. Not even

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Golgoth could have such remarkable powers of persuasion.

I suppose we were very dumb, but Maribel and I didn't suspect a thing till the note came. The note from Chotsy. We read it together:

"You know the dreadful things that are happening," Chotsy began without salutation. "Well, it's all my fault! Yes it is! I've been kidnapped by a man named Golgoth, who's holding me a prisoner. He forces me to walk by war-production plants, and naturally when the workers smell my perfume, they drop everything and follow.

"I've scrubbed myself and scrubbed myself. But Potts was right . . . this awful perfume is on me for good.

"It's Golgoth's plan to take me from city to city, until war production is at a standstill, or at least, seriously delayed. We're leaving for the Coast tomorrow morning.

"Meanwhile we're in the old warehouse on Front Street. Under it, the missing men are imprisoned in subterranean cells.

"Oh, Bill, Maribel! Save me before morning, or I swear I'll kill myself. Better I should die than the Allies lose the war!"

Maribel and I stared at each other gravely. We were sober as we realized the grave responsibility that rested upon us. I snapped into action.

"Get Potts on the phone! Get him over here!"

Maribel leaped to my bidding . . . a strangely subdued Maribel.

THE professor guessed we had news of Chotsy, and arrived on the run. We showed him the letter. The man was nearly frantic. "What shall we do? Shall we go to the FBI?"

"And get clapped into a hospital for the mentally sick?" I asked. "No. We started this mess, and we'll finish it."

"But if we save Chotsy and release these men," Potts objected, "they'll only follow her all over again."

I said, "Not if the idea I have works. Potts, can you . . . ?"

Quickly I relayed what was in my mind. Professor Potts nodded.

"I'll do my best," he promised. "Of course we can't be sure it'll be effective."

"No help for it. We have to try." With a push, I sent him on his way.

There was nothing to do but wait till he came back. Two hours later, he returned and handed me a small phial. It was the last thing necessary before I started out. Just before I left with Professor Potts, who insisted on accompanying me, Maribel grabbed me around the neck and kissed me.

"I'll never, never listen to Satan again," she vowed. And there were tears of contrition in her eyes.

It was almost worth the whole sorry mess to see her reduced to such an abject state.

THE address Chotsy gave us in the note proved to be down on the river-front. It was a street of sagging wooden houses, lighted by dim gas lamps. Potts and I reconnoitered. Occasionally the hoot of a river boat broke the deathly silence.

The warehouse was pitch-dark. So far as we could tell there were no guards posted.

"We'll run for it," I whispered. "Make for the warehouse door."

Potts nodded. We ran across the unpaved, rutted street. When my hands were grasping the cracked white china knob of the warehouse door, Potts said, "Perhaps this is foolhardy. Coming here without weapons, except for that phial of—"

"Ssssh!" I said, though I wondered if he wasn't right. The phial wasn't a

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weapon, merely a precaution. But I turned the knob anyway. "Come on."

There was a flight of crazy steps leading upward. And from everywhere the smell of musty wood so usual in ancient buildings. Potts and I began to creep upstairs stealthily.

At the top landing we paused before a door, while I pressed my ear to the keyhole. Nothing. No sound. Only Potts breathing down my neck. I turned the knob.

There hadn't been a glimmer of light around the door. So I was unprepared for the great blaze of it that poured out when I opened the door. Momentarily blinded, I heard Potts gasp. Then we caught a swift glimpse of Chotsy tied to the wall opposite. A little to the left a grossly fat man, who I knew must be Golgoth, was standing.

He had a revolver in his hand.

I heard him swear gutturally, then he lifted the gun. I dropped, and dived forward at the same time. The gun barked, and I felt a searing pain through my right shoulder. I felt, rather than saw, Potts dive over me; heard Golgoth's grunt as the professor's athletic body plunged against him.

Chotsy screamed to me, "Bill! Golgoth's got Potts!"

I struggled upward. Golgoth had tripped Potts, then thrown his immense bulk on top of the luckless professor. Potts groaned and passed out.

Despite his obesity Golgoth was quick on his feet. He jumped up and started for me. I let go a wild hay-maker, aimed for just behind his right ear. But I slipped, and the blow caught him just above the heart. With a little sigh, Golgoth sank to the floor.

I stared stupidly at his inert form. I didn't think I'd hit him hard enough to do any damage. But when Potts recovered and we'd released Chotsy and went back to examine Golgoth, we saw that he was dead. And then I knew . . . his excess weight . . . the great strain his heart had endured, perhaps for years . . . a slight blow was enough to stop its ticking forever . . .

ONE thing remained to be done before we released the men from the cellars below. Keeping a firm grip on my nose so as not to smell her irresistible perfume, I turned to Chotsy, my heart heavy.

"My dear—" I began sadly.

But she had already suspected. "I know. My perfume." There was an heroic light in her eyes. "I must die, then?"

Gad, but she was a gallant woman! I shook my head, fighting back tears. "I'm unmanned," I explained unashamedly.

Professor Potts watched us without a word.

I took the phial from my pocket. Before I withdrew the stopper I looked at Chotsy. A slight inclination of her head gave me permission. She steeled herself for the unknown.

I withdrew the cork and poured the contents of the phial over her. And, despite my pinched nostrils, I nearly passed out from the fumes of the highly-concentrated essence of garlic which Professor Potts had prepared!

The room reeked. No perfume, no matter how irresistible, could hope to combat this newer scent.

Chotsy took the blow standing. But one wild, despairing cry was torn from her lips. "I've lost him! I've lost him! No man could come near me now!"

She meant Professor Potts, I knew. I was about to turn my back when it happened.

Professor Potts caught her in his arms and began to rain kisses upon her! I marvelled that he could stand

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it. The man, I thought, must be made of iron.

"It doesn't matter, Chotsy darling!" he cried. "Why do you suppose I was the only one who could resist your perfume? Why did I invent the perfumometer? *Because I* have no *sense of smell!*"

MARIBEL and I sent Potts and Chotsy a salad bowl for their wedding present. (They received seventeen salad bowls, we learned later.) They were living on an island off the coast of lower California but, Chotsy wrote, Potts was making a super-concentrate of a certain well-known odor-killing mouthwash. Perhaps one day she could again take her place in the world of people.

~~My shoulder healed nicely, and it~~ remained only for Satan's letter to close the episode. ~~White with rage, I saw Satan's post-~~ It was worded somewhat too affectionately for my tastes, since it was addressed to my wife.

"Maribel, my sweet:

"You mustn't reproach yourself for your failure with Potts. It doesn't matter a bit. What with Golgoth, and the hordes of Nazis and Japs we're receiving down here (thanks to you!) Hell is a veritable bee-hive of activity these days.

"Indeed, a coal shortage is rumored, so I'm busy installing electric ovens to take care of the overflow. Must stop now. Awfully rushed. As ever, your own,

Satan."

"Isn't that nice of him?" Maribel said fatuously.

"Not a word about me, you'll notice," I crabbed. "And after all I've done!"

But, smiling smugly, Maribel pointed.

~~White with rage, I saw Satan's post-~~ script:

"Is Bill still cramping your style?"

THE END

"IS GOD DEAD?"

(as this war grows worse Americans are asking that question)

Well, I can say to them that God is most certainly NOT dead for I TALKED WITH GOD, and as a result of that little talk with God a strange Power came into my life. After 42 years of horrible, dismal, sickening failure, everything took on a brighter hue. It's fascinating to talk with God, and it can be done very easily once you learn the secret. And when you do—well—there will come into your life the same dynamic Power which came into mine. The shackles of defeat which bound me for years went a-shimmering—and now—?—well, I own control of the largest daily newspaper in our County, I own the largest office building in our City, I drive a beautiful Cadillac limousine. I own my own home which has a lovely pipe-organ in it, and my family are abundantly provided for after I'm gone. And all this has been made possible because one day, ten years ago, I actually and literally talked with God.

You, too, may experience that strange mystical Power which comes from talking with God, and when you do, if there is poverty, unrest, unhappiness, or ill-health in your life, well—this same God-Power is able to do for you what it did for me. No matter how useless or helpless your life seems to be—all this can be changed. For this is not a human Power I'm talking about—it's a God-Power. And there can be no limitations to the God-Power, can there? Of course not. You probably would like to know how you, too, may talk with God, so that this same Power which brought me these good things might come into your life, too. Well—just write a letter or a postcard to Dr. Frank B. Robinson, Dept. 111, Moscow, Idaho, and full particulars of this strange Teaching will be sent to you free of charge. But write now—while you are in the mood. It only costs one cent to find out, and this might easily be the most profitable one cent you have ever spent. It may sound unbelievable—but it's true, or I wouldn't tell you it was.—Advt. Copyright, 1942, Frank B. Robinson.

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IT'S AN INTERESTING WORLD!

By WESLEY ROLAND

A NEW KIND OF GUNNERY COMPETITION

MAN HAS always been proud of his homeland—in fact so proud, that he can rarely conceive of any other country doing a better job at anything than his own. This type of psychology has found expression in various international competitions— examples of which are: Olympic games, world champion boxing matches, international golf and tennis matches, also many others.

This is all a common fact to the average reader who probably followed eagerly the outcome of these various competitions. Has the reader, however, heard of the National and International Fungus-Gunnery Competition? Probably not.

In this form of competition a new type of gun is used. Not a metallic and inanimate gun, but a living fungus—named Sphaerobolus. Let me explain more clearly. Fungi are types of plants, in some cases they are so small as to be unseen by the unaided eye. It is fungi that causes our bread to mold—our food to spoil. Fungi reproduce themselves by means of spores. If one magnifies a bread mold fungus, it will appear as follows: A slender thread-like stalk which terminates at one of its ends into deeply branching nutritive fibers. The other end of the stalk supports a spore case—which is in reality a toughened bag-like structure, containing in its inside hundreds of black seedlike spores. Each of these spores is capable of reproducing another fungus—of course exactly like its parent. The spore case is so tough, that in its interior spores may survive almost any type of severe conditions. Once the environment becomes suitable for the development of a spore, the spore case ruptures and scatters the hundreds of tiny spores into the air.

The above description holds true for most of the common household fungi.

The Sphaerobolus is a unique type of fungus. It actually propels its spores through space in the same manner that a gun propels its projectile. By this means, the Sphaerobolus can make sure of scattering its seeds. It does need the wind to carry off its spores—it merely shoots its spores out in all directions. According to Dr. Buller, the projectile (or spore case 1/5 of an inch in diameter) lies loosely on a cup-shaped web of tissue. When this cup-shaped bed suddenly turns itself inside-out, it throws the spore a considerable distance. According to Dr. Reginald Buller, this process of discharge takes about a thousandth of a second.

Hugh Nicol in his book entitled, Microbes By The Million, offers a fascinating account of the game that the fungi experts have made of this shooting Sphaerobolus—each scientist attempting to outdo the other scientist by having his Sphaerobolus outshoot the Sphaeroboli of his colleagues. Let us look into some of the important highlights of this weirdest of all sports—using as a source, Hugh Nicol's book Microbes By The Million. It seems that fungus-gunnery competition first started in 1920, when Dr. Buller broke all previous records with a horizontal projection of 15 feet. Miss Leva B. Walker (U. S. A.) decided that no Canadian could outdo her, and so an international competition arose. Miss Leva Walker began to specialize on vertical range. Her method of approach was a unique one indeed. She constructed a celluloid cylinder approximately 17 feet high. At the bottom of this cylinder she placed a culture of ripe Sphaerobolus. When these fungi discharged, the spore case would be hurled from the inverted cup. The sides of the cylinder were made sticky so that wherever a spore case hit, it would remain stuck to the wall as a permanent record of the height it had attained. All Miss Walker had to do, was to leave the cylinder and go about her other duties. Whenever she wanted to know the record vertical height reached, she merely went to her cylinder and looked for the highest spore that was glued to the wall of the cylinder. In this manner, Miss Walker was able to show that two projectiles had actually reached the vertical height of 14 feet 5 inches.

Dr. Buller was not to be outdone. So he applied mathematics to his problem, in hope of attaining better results. It is a known fact that the greatest horizontal range of a projectile is obtained when the gun shooting this projectile is set at a 45° angle. Using this angle, and also a local Canadian strain, Dr. Buller was happy to report a shot of 18 feet 7 inches.

According to Hugh Nicol, the result of the competition (probably up to the year 1937) was as follows:

The altitude record was held by Miss L. B. Walker (U. S. A.) who recorded a shot of 14 ft. 5 in. Dr. Reginald Buller (Canadian) comes next with a poor second of 7¾ feet.

On the horizontal range, Dr. Buller's 18 ft. 17 in. shot is tops. Miss Walker is right behind him, to take second place with a recorded shot of 17 ft. 3 in.

What are we waiting for, fellow Americans? Let's get both records.

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The SKELETON IN THE CLOSET

By TARLETON FISKE

At that, maybe the old guy's skeleton was the only "living" person who could solve his own murder. You'll admit the killer would hardly expect such a thing

WHEN I opened the closet door I saw the skeleton.

He was hanging there on the third hook from the left.

I just shook my head and smiled. . . .

When I came to, I was lying on the floor. The closet door was still open. I raised my eyes timidly. On the floor of the closet I saw a pair of rubbers, some old, dusty tennis shoes, and two ancient house slippers.

I glanced higher and noticed a raincoat, an overcoat, a pair of slacks, and an old hat hanging on the hooks.

Also, the skeleton.

This time I didn't faint. I even managed to get up off the floor. But I couldn't stop looking at the horror.

It dangled there, suspended by its spine from the hook, with bony body swaying to and fro. It was rather large for a skeleton, as skeletons go—and how I wished this one would! I noticed the unusually big bones, and particularly, the face. Or rather, the lack of face. The skull itself grinned a grisly grin. There was mockery in the hollow eye sockets, and menace in the leering teeth.

I wondered wildly how this skeleton had turned up in the closet. Had he been a human being trapped in there and eaten by moths? No—because the door was unlocked.

I sighed. This was just what I might expect to find in my uncle's house.

He had been interested in sorcery—black magic. My uncle was quite an eccentric that way. Every Halloween I used to send him a birthday card. Outside of that we seldom communicated, and all I knew of him was through hearsay. Rumors of what went on in his big house in the country. Rumors about his unusual library of forbidden books, and of the secret societies he was mixed up with. To judge from these reports he was mixed up plenty.

But I'd dismissed all that.

When I received word of his sudden death a little while ago, the lawyer gave me a key to the house and said I'd inherited his estate.

So here I was. And here was the skeleton.

You can't stand looking at a skeleton forever. As for me, I can't stand looking at a skeleton.

So after a moment, I sat down. Sat

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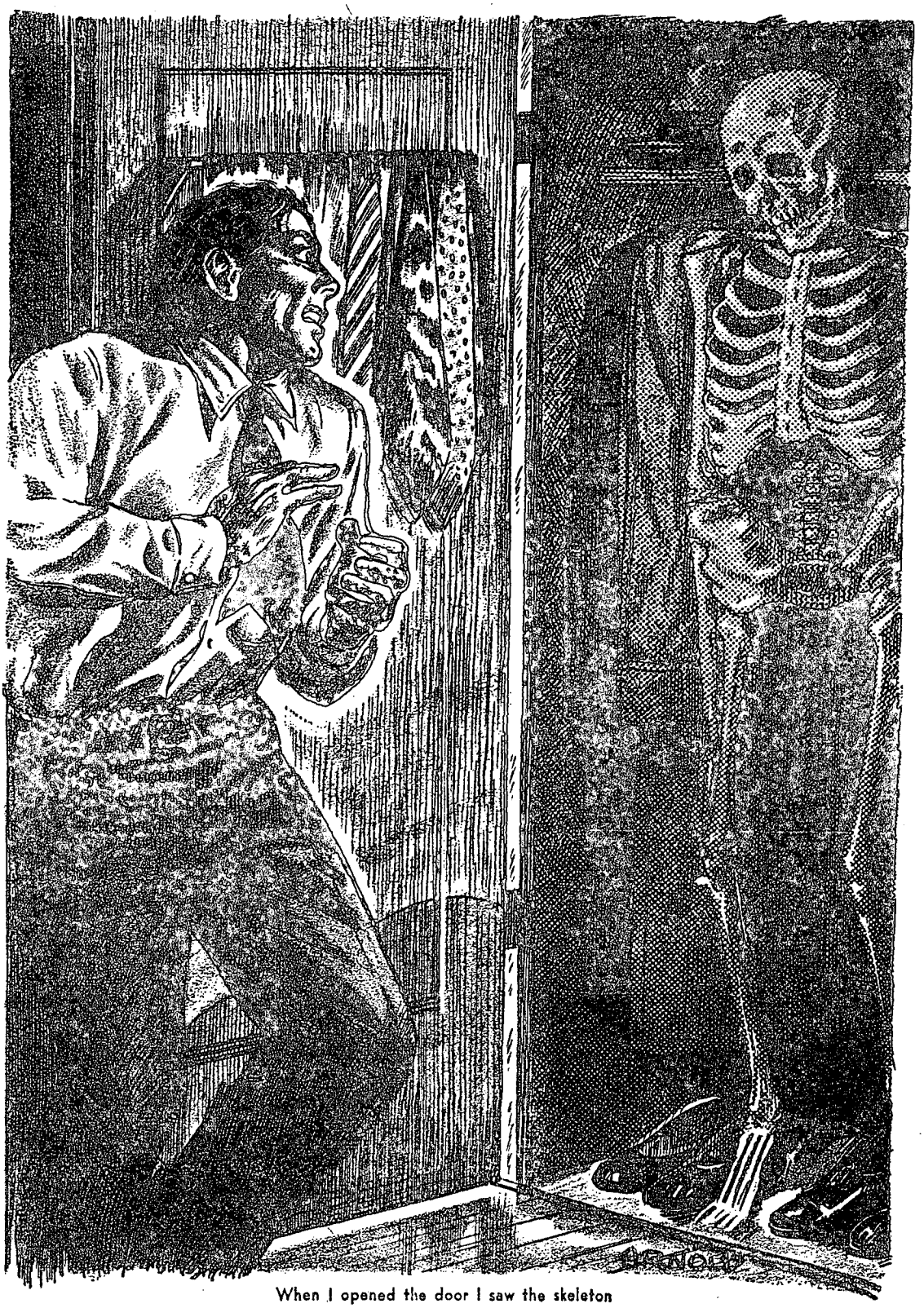

When I opened the door I saw the skeleton

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down and poured myself a nice, stiff drink.

I raised the glass to my lips to shut out the sight of the skeleton hanging in the open closet. I started to gulp.

"Get me down off this damn hook and I'll join you," grunted a voice.

I finished my gulp. The glass fell from my fingers as I stared in startled horror at the closet.

The skeleton was speaking!

"You've spilled your drink," the voice told me.

I spilled another, in a hurry. Right down my throat. And then another.

Talking skeletons! Was it alive?

"Come on," said the skeleton. "Do you think I want to spend the rest of my life in this stuffy closet?"

The skeleton had a deep, sepulchral voice, I noticed. I wondered how he could articulate—though he was a well-articulated skeleton.

"Spend the rest of your *what?*" I answered him, through chattering teeth. "You've already spent your life, from the looks of you. Tossed it away. Never saw anyone with less looks of life about him. You shouldn't worry about stuffy closets. You need a nice, stuffy grave."

"Well, I can't go to one unless you take me off this hook," argued the skeleton.

I TOOK another drink—from the bottle, this time. The liquor combined with my fright and worked fast. His argument almost sounded reasonable. Although the clicking of his bones sounded plain ghastly.

"Come on," the skeleton urged. "Lift me down."

"Who's going to hold me up while I'm lifting you down?" I argued.

"What's there to be afraid of?" countered the skeleton.

"If I had a mirror, I'd show you," I told him. "I can't stand the sight of you hanging there."

"Then take me off the hook."

I approached him gingerly and with trembling fingers hooked around his spine, I lifted him down and set him on the floor.

The skeleton ran to the table with amazing and horrifying alacrity. He scrabbled around and poured out a drink. Three fingers. Three bony fingers.

With clicking elbow-sockets, he raised the glass to his lips—or to where his lips once were—and tossed the drink off.

"Where does the stuff go?" I wondered. Aloud, I said, "Where did you come from?"

The skeleton faced me. "What's it to you?" he asked.

"Well how would you like it if you came into a house, opened the closet door, and found a skeleton?"

"I'd like it pretty well," he said. "Then I'd have some company."

I shuddered.

"I'm so lonesome," the skeleton complained. "You don't know how it feels to be a skeleton."

"I don't want to find out, either."

"You will," said the skeleton, with a ghastly leer. "Some day."

"I still want to know how you got into that closet."

"You might say I used a skeleton key," he told me.

"I might say the hell with you, too," I replied. "In fact, that's just what I do say."

"And I say let's have another drink." The skeleton poured. My hands were shaking, but I managed to drink. We clicked teeth rather than glasses.

"Here's looking at you," said the skeleton.

"Here's not looking at you," I answered. "And speaking of that happy

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prospect, you've got to get out of here, you know. I can't have you hanging around this way. What would my friends think?"

"Couldn't you tell them I was your family skeleton?" he asked, wistfully. "After all, what can I do in my position?"

"You can lie down and play dead."

"This is a bit unusual, I admit," the skeleton acknowledged. "There isn't much precedent for it, is there? Wonder if we could get some help to figure things out."

"Well, we could read Thorne Smith's *Skin and Bones,*" I suggested. "He had a few remarks to make about a live skeleton. Only his case happened to be a man who turned into a skeleton and back to a man, intermittently. And the man was really there all the time—that is, his flesh was. He just *looked* like a skeleton."

"That wouldn't help me. I not only look like one—I feel like one, and I *am* one." The skeleton took another drink.

I FOLLOWED suit. For some reason or other, I was beginning to feel quite tipsy. It couldn't have been the liquor—or was it? At any rate, the skeleton no longer seemed so frightful. He no longer terrified me. I adopted a somewhat haughty attitude when I addressed him next.

"By the way," I observed, "I'm not exactly in the habit of speaking to strange skeletons. Might I ask your name?"

"You might," said the fleshless one. "But you won't get much of an answer." He hiccuped, rattling his lower jaw alarmingly.

"See here," I flared. "Who are you? Or, rather, who *were* you?"

"Damned if I know," the skeleton confessed. "That's what's puzzling me. I'm afraid I can't remember. It's amnesia, I guess. Must have been in some kind of an accident."

"It was a pretty severe accident, judging from the looks of you," I told him.

The skeleton shook his head mournfully.

"You don't know how you got in my closet or why you're still alive, or who you are?" I persisted.

"That's right."

"That's wrong," I corrected. "It's contrary to all the laws of nature. You shouldn't be alive, and you certainly shouldn't be hanging in strange closets."

"It doesn't bother me half as much as not knowing what my name is," the sksleton insisted. "I'm really curious to find that out."

"Maybe I'd better call the morgue," I suggested, "and see if they're missing you."

"Try the funeral parlors, too," the skeleton added.

I picked up the phone and fumbled for the directory.

"Wait a minute," I said. "I can't call these joints and ask if they're minus a live skeleton. The cops would be after me with butterfly nets. We'll have to think of another way."

The skeleton regarded me with a grave look. What other kind of look a skeleton has, I don't know. Or care to know.

"By the way, speaking of names—you haven't told me your name yet, my friend."

I blinked. "So I haven't. I'm Tarleton Fiske. This is the home of my deceased uncle, Magnus Lorry."

"Magnus Lorry? Lorry?" Bony fingers pressed into the skull. "But that's *my* name! It came back to me now. I'm Magnus Lorry—this is my home. And you're my nephew! I'll be a monkey's unc—"

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"No insults," I warned him. And gulped.

"You're my uncle," I said. "I can't believe it."

"Why not?"

"Otis Kersen, your lawyer—he said you died of a stroke. You were buried in the family vault at Hopecrest Cemetery. Private funeral, and he handled all the details. There were no mourners present."

"No mourners?"

"I'm the only one left in the family," I explained. "And I was out of town. Otis Kersen wired me. You left me this house and your estate."

"Nobody mourned for me?" repeated the skeleton. "How unfortunate to let a poor man die friendless like that! If I could have been there, I would have mourned."

"You weren't such a friendly fellow when alive," I said, blushing. "You were something of a recluse. Eccentric. You were a—wizard, I believe you called yourself."

"So I was!" exclaimed the skeleton. "I do remember that. I was quite a sorcerer, wasn't I?"

"Yes, I've heard it said."

"MAYBE that's why I'm still alive," the skeleton mused. "I might have had a premonition of death and cast a spell to preserve my consciousness."

"Perhaps."

"But it's funny—there's still a lot I can't seem to recollect. For example, I don't remember having a stroke. I don't recall anything about my death."

"That's not unusual in amnesia cases," I told him. "Often a victim just recovers partial memory. The rest may gradually return."

"Stroke, eh?" said the skeleton. "Get me a mirror."

"What for?"

"I want to look at myself."

"You're not worth seeing," I argued, honestly.

"Get me a mirror, nephew."

"Very well, Uncle Magnus."

I got him a hand mirror from the dresser in the bedroom. My skeleton uncle grasped it and stared at his reflection, shuddering the while.

"My, I'm gruesome!" he exclaimed.

I nodded.

"Rather repulsive, too?"

"Definitely," I agreed.

"Hate to meet myself up a dark alley."

"Certainly would."

"Hey—"

The skeleton ran a bony phalange across the back of his skull.

"What is it?"

"Look," the skeleton exclaimed. "See this hole in my head?"

"Where?"

"Right here."

"What is it?" I asked, noting the round little opening in his skull.

"It's a bullet hole," gasped the skeleton.

"A bullet hole?"

"Definitely. And you know what?"

"What?"

"I didn't die of a stroke. I've been murdered!"

"No!" I gasped.

"Yes. This bullet must have gone clean through the *medulla oblongata*. Otis Kersen, or somebody, was lying. I tell you, I was murdered!"

"But why—how—?"

"That's not the point," the skeleton rasped. "It's *who?*" I'm going to find out if it takes the rest of my life—I mean, death!"

MAGNUS LORRY rose to his bony feet and danced up and down excitedly while his vertebrae rattled like castanets.

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"I'm going to track down the person who killed me!" he yelled.

"And then what?"

"I haven't forgotten my sorcery," he declared. "I'll cook up a fate for my slayer that he'll never forget as long as he lives—and that won't be long."

My unusual uncle grated his teeth unpleasantly. I averted my eyes in distress.

"Call that fat swine, Otis Kersen! Get that illegal eagle on the wire for me," he ordered.

Obediently, I dialed the attorney's office.

"Mr. Kersen, please," I requested.

"Mr. Kersen is out of town," replied the stenographer's voice on the other end of the wire. "He's gone to Buffalo for a convention."

I reported the news.

"Buffalo? Hell and damnation!" growled the skeleton.

"You suspect him?" I asked.

"I suspect everybody!" the skeleton groaned. "I have no friends. Nobody loves me. Nobody cares. I might as well be dead."

"Don't cry," I said.

"I can't cry," he sighed. "Can't even cry. But I can still act. And I'm going to."

"What do you propose?"

"I think I'm going to do a little sleuthing. A little amateur detective work to find out who murdered me." He stabbed a bony finger in my direction. "And you're going to help me, nephew."

"Glad to. How do we begin?"

"We'll pay a couple of visits."

"Where to?"

"We shall call on some of my rivals."

"Rivals?"

"Rival wizards," my uncle explained. "There are several others in this vicinity who secretly practice the mantic arts. Cheap sorcerers. All of them were jealous of me and my fine collection of incunabula."

"You have incunabula?" I asked.

"Tons of it," he declared. "More damned incunabula than you can shake a stick at."

"Doesn't it hurt?"

"Incunabula are books written before 1600," my uncle explained. "I have the finest library on sorcery extant. And some of these scoundrels knew it. I'll bet one of them bumped me off, figuring my estate would be up for sale and he could steal my precious manuscripts and formulæ for a song. That must be it."

"Any idea who might figure such a plot out?" I inquired.

"Well, there's the Mighty Omar," said Magnus Lorry.

"Who is he?"

"A spiritualist, and a fake spiritualistic medium at that. He's just a charlatan who makes a living by holding fraudulent seances, and playing the suckers. He's really interested in the occult, and knowing my real powers, he always hated my guts—when I had them, that is."

"Do you think that he—?"

"I've got a hunch," said the skeleton. "Come on, we'll visit him first." He rose and clanked across the room to the door.

"Wait a minute!" I protested. "You can't go out like that."

"Why not?"

"People will see you walking around—you must be disguised, somehow.

"Useless," he told me. "You can't disguise a face and figure like the one I haven't got."

"But you'll start a riot!"

"Then you'll have to carry me," my uncle said. "That's it! You can carry me in your arms. Say that you're delivering a skeleton to a medical school. I'll play dead."

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"That won't be hard for you," I sighed. "But the idea of dragging a skeleton along the street in broad daylight doesn't appeal to me."

"Would you rather wait until after dark, then? Around midnight?"

"Midnight is no time for me to mess with skeletons either. On second thought, we'd better go right now."

I picked him up gingerly by his clavicles.

"Hold still now," I breathed.

CARRYING him down the hall, I kicked open the door, walked down the driveway, and put him in the car. Climbing into the driver's seat, I started the motor.

"Where to?" I asked.

He gave me the address, and we were off.

Luckily the streets were not crowded as we drove into city traffic. Soon we moved through the winding streets of the fashionable suburban district where the Mighty Omar had his residence.

Halting for a stop-light, Uncle Magnus turned to me with a leer.

"Step on it," he murmured. "I can't wait to appear before the Mighty Omar. I'll scare him out of a week's growth! The mere sight of me ought to shake a confession out of his guilty mouth."

"Quiet!" I panted. "Do you want somebody to hear you talking? Stop turning your head that way—people will notice."

As a matter of fact, somebody had already noticed. About the most unpleasant somebody I could think of.

A big traffic cop loomed outside the window.

"Hey," he growled. "What you got there?"

"Just a skeleton, officer. I'm taking it over to medical school."

"Did I see it move?" he persisted, eyeing the bony skull with evident distaste.

"Perhaps the car jiggled it a bit," I hazarded.

"Oh, my mistake."

The cop was about to turn away when Uncle Magnus gave vent to an unfortunate impulse. He hiccuped, loudly.

Instantly the cop wheeled.

"What's that?" he said.

"I hiccuped," I told him.

"Drunk, eh? Driving while drunk?" He reached eagerly for his ticket pad.

"Not at all, officer. Just a little sour stomach."

"Oh."

Uncle Magnus couldn't hold it any longer. He hiccuped again, his jaws moving visibly.

"Holy Ike!" barked the officer. "That skeleton moved!"

"How could it move?" I asked, innocently. "You know that such a thing is impossible."

"Oh yeah? Well it did move," said the cop. "And it hiccuped, too! There's something wrong with that skeleton, I'm telling you! Something mighty wrong."

"That's why I'm taking it to medical school."

THE cop wasn't satisfied. His beefy hand came thrusting through the window and he fingered Uncle Magnus's collar-bone.

"What's the matter, officer?" I asked, nervously. "Why are you fingering my skeleton?"

"Is that your skeleton?"

"Of course. Whose else would it be?"

"How can it be your skeleton?" snarled the officer. "Your skeleton must be under your skin."

"Well—"

"Therefore," persisted the cop, with a warning gleam in his eye, "this is not your skeleton. And if it is not your

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skeleton, then it must be stolen. What are you doing with a stolen skeleton, you grave-robber?"

It was a horrible moment. And Uncle Magnus chose it for a demonstration.

"Take your pawing hands off me, you big lug," he groaned. "I'm not his skeleton and I'm not your skeleton—I'm my own skeleton, I'll have you know. And if there's any graves robbed, it's likely to be your own—because I'm going to put you in one in a hurry!"

I had never seen a traffic cop run before. It was an enthralling spectacle. How a man could move so fast in those heavy boots, I didn't know. But he was really speedy.

We drove away with equal swiftness. Uncle Magnus chuckled repulsively in my ear.

"Stop that!" I warned him. "And for heaven's sake, cut out this business of frightening strangers."

"Just rehearsing for the Mighty Omar," said my uncle. "I'll really give him the business."

We drove up to the imposingly gaunt frame house that served as residence and place of business for the medium.

I parked and got out.

"Pick me up," whispered my uncle. "Under your arm. And ring the bell. He has a colored butler, but I doubt if he'll trouble us long. We'll go right in and interview our spiritualistic friend. Just let me handle him and everything will be dandy."

Somehow I doubted this last statement.

But there was nothing else to do.

Picking up Uncle Magnus, I started up the walk, carrying the skeleton under my arm.

I rang the bell.

The door opened. A bearded negro dressed as a Hindu peered out with rolling eyes. "You wish to have audience with the Mighty Omar?" he intoned, in a sonorous voice.

I nodded.

The door swung wider.

The bearded negro caught sight of my bony burden.

"Lawd save us!" he shrieked, in purest Harlemese. "The haunts are done arriving!"

A moment later I stepped over his prostrate body and stalked down the hall. Uncle Magnus rattled with anticipation under my elbow.

We faced a darkened doorway. "Here," he whispered. "Let me down and we'll sneak in."

We opened the door on pitch blackness. The seance was in full swing.

Moving quietly, we entered the darkened room. My eyes slowly became accustomed to the dimness and soon I could see faint outlines in the gloom.

SIX fat women were seated around a large table with their hands resting on its surface. At the head of the table, like the caller at the Bingo game where these women really belonged, was the Mighty Omar.

The Mighty Omar was a little dried-up man dressed in a turban and an oriental night-gown. He had a face like a prune, and it didn't take long to see that he also had plenty of new wrinkles.

At the moment the Mighty Omar was right in the middle of his act. In fact, he was just going into his trance.

"Oh Mighty Brahm!" he whispered in the darkness. "By the powers of Raja Yoga I command thee—tear aside the veil! Let thy humble servant enter the astral plane and commune with the shades of the departed."

Uncle Magnus rattled angrily at my side, but made no move to interfere just yet.

"Ah!" sighed the Mighty Omar. "I

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am going now—I am passing through—and who is that I see? Ah yes! It is my psychic guide to the spirit world—Doctor Anabana!"

In a normal voice he confided to the ladies. "Doctor Anabana is a low-plane spirit. He will summon the souls of your dear departed ones and give you their messages. Who wishes to speak to Doctor Anabana?"

The fat lady next to the Mighty Omar cleared her throat nervously.

"Ask him about Grandpa," she quavered. "Grandpa Ike Snodtrotter."

"I will try," moaned the Mighty Omar. "It is hard—so hard." He breathed deeply. "I have a lady, Doctor," he said.

A voice came out of the air. It was shrill, eery.

"What does she desire?"

"She wants to communicate with Ike Snodtrotter. Have you a Mr. Snodtrotter there?"

"I shall see," said the high voice. "If he is here and has a message for the lady, he will communicate with her by knocking the table."

There was a long, ominous silence. Suddenly the table resounded with a furious rapping.

"Grandpa, is that you?" gasped the fat lady.

Again a knocking.

"It is your grandfather," said the high voice of Doctor Anabana, the "spirit guide."

"How are you, Grandpa?" asked the lady, anxiously. "How do you feel?"

"Grandpa says he feels fine," said the high voice. "And to prove it, he will play the tambourine."

Sure enough, from out of nowhere floated a ghostly tambourine, lit by glowing phosphorescence. It sailed above the table in mid-air and suddenly clinked and clanked.

"You see?" said the Mighty Omar, abruptly coming out of his trance. "But we must hurry lest the astral spell be broken. Do any other ladies wish to commune with the departed?"

"I wonder," said a lady at the opposite end of the table. "I would like you to see if you couldn't find my Aunt Agatha."

"We can try," said the Mighty Omar. "If Doctor Anabana is willing. What is your Aunt Agatha's full name?"

"Agatha Flug."

THE Mighty Omar cleared his throat. As he did so, I felt the skeleton moving away from my side in the darkness.

"I have a lady, Doctor," intoned the Mighty Omar.

"Ten dollars to that lady!" rasped a voice.

"What?" muttered Omar, in a flustered haste.

"I'm sorry," said the voice. "Thought I was Doctor I.Q."

"Doctor Anabana?" called Omar, in puzzled tones. "Do you hear me?"

"Doctor Anabana had to leave," said the voice—which I now recognized as belonging to my skeleton uncle. "Doctor Gillespie wanted him in the surgery. This is Doctor Banana speaking. I've come to take his place."

"What goes on here?" yelled the Mighty Omar. Then, hastily realizing his position, he recovered dignity. "Will you locate Miss Agatha Flug, please?" he asked.

"To hear is to obey," said my uncle. He raised his voice. "Hey, Aggie!" he bawled. "Company!"

"This is most unusual," fluttered the lady at the end of the table. "Are you sure your spirit control is on the right astral plane?"

"Astral plane?" mocked my uncle. "I'm on an astral dive-bomber, sister! Wait, you wanted to speak to your

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aunt. Well, here's the old buzzard now. Knock on wood."

Sure enough, the rapping sounded on the table top. But it was a most peculiar rapping—in Conga rhythm.

"One and two and three—kick!" said a high voice, which came from my skeleton uncle, doing his best to imitate a woman.

"How do you feel up there, Aunt Agatha?" breathed the woman at the end of the table.

"I'll show you how I feel," said my uncle, in falsetto. "I'll play you something on the flute."

Incredibly, a silver flute, also phosphorescent, floated out over the heads of the Mighty Omar and the ladies.

"Hit it!" snapped my uncle.

The flute began to play.

"Did you ever hear Pete go tweet-tweet-tweet on his piccolo?"

"What the blue blazes?" screamed the Mighty Omar, forgetting himself.

"That's not my Aunt Agatha!" wailed the lady.

"It's a demon!" yelled the woman beside her. "Ooooh—I felt something tickle me!"

She wasn't the only one. As the hysterical flute tooted on, several of the ladies began to giggle and shriek.

The Mighty Omar rose to his feet.

"What in hell is all this?" he howled. "Turn on the lights!"

It was a bad idea.

The lights went on.

When the ladies saw the live skeleton sitting on the Mighty Omar's lap with the flute in his bony mouth, they didn't wait.

Even as they rose to flee, the skeleton jerked one fleshless arm towards a curtain. He pulled a string. A tambourine and two horns fell on the table, along with a microphone, a loudspeaker, a sheet on a wire, and a midget who had been sitting concealed on a perch near the ceiling.

"I'm from the spirit world!" yelled the skeleton. "Any messages today or would you care to say it with flowers?"

The ladies weren't listening. They were running out of the room.

THE Mighty Omar rose swiftly, dumping the living skeleton to the floor. He tried to dive through the legs of the departing fat women.

A bony hand jerked him back by the collar.

"Come on," said my uncle. "You called up a spirit, now give me a message."

"Let me go," whined Omar. "Go back to hell or wherever you came from."

"Not unless you come with me," grated my uncle.

"Wh—what do you want with me?" The medium was trembling.

"I'm taking you to see an old friend," rasped my uncle. "An old friend named Magnus Lorry."

"B-b-but he's dead."

"I know," growled my uncle. "And you murdered him. Didn't you?"

"N—no—no, I didn't! Let me go!" howled the fake spiritualist. "I'm just a harmless medium—I never murdered Magnus Lorry—I just dabbled a bit in the occult—I never believed—I never knew—"

The skeleton relaxed his grip.

"I ought to take you anyway," he hissed. "But I'll let you go this time if you'll promise me one thing."

"Anything. Anything at all!" sobbed the not-so-Mighty Omar.

"Give up this vile racket," said the skeleton. "Get a job in the war industries or something useful."

"Yes—I will—right away."

The skeleton released him and stalked off. I followed.

As we went down the hall, somebody

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rang the front door. It opened abruptly as we neared it, and to my consternation I recognized the figure standing there in the twilight.

It was the traffic cop who had halted us at the corner.

"Here you are!" he snorted. "I've tracked you down at last!"

"Here we aren't!" said my skeletonic uncle, turning and taking to his bony heels down the hall. I followed with some speed as I noted the revolver in the cop's pudgy hand.

"Back door," wheezed my uncle.

The cop thundered behind us. "Halt or I'll shoot!" he bawled.

We didn't and he did—but by the time the bullet buried itself in the back door we had slammed it behind us. At a dead run we made for the car in the twilight.

"Where to?" I gasped.

"To hell out of this place," directed my uncle. "Gas rationing be damned!"

We whizzed into the street. The cop appeared and in the rear-view mirror I noted that he was mounting a motorcyle.

I turned a corner quickly.

"Guess the Mighty Omar wasn't guilty," said Uncle Magnus.

"I'm not so sure," I told him.

"He was too frightened to lie out of it," argued the living skeleton. "How did you like my act?"

"It frightened me," I admitted.

"Good. If we can dodge this cop, I'll try it again."

"Who have you in mind?"

"Dr. Eggkopf. He's a psychiatrist at the army induction center."

"A psychiatrist?"

"Yes, but his hobby is collecting demonolatra—books on sorcery. He used to grab off items at the book dealers' shops and he hated me."

"You want to go to the army induction center now?" I asked, whizzing through an arterial as I noted the cop on the motorcycle behind us.

"Afraid I can't," panted Uncle Magnus.

"Why not?"

"Isn't safe to get myself involved there," said the skeleton. "Doctor Eggkopf is pretty nearsighted and a tough customer. If I visit him at the army induction center he's liable to draft me."

I TRIED to answer, but by this time the wailing of the siren on the motorcycle drowned out my reply.

"He's gaining on us!" screamed my uncle. "Nosey fool!"

I twisted and turned. We were now in the heart of the downtown area. The siren blasted and we drove hell-for-leather. The skeleton bounced around in the back seat.

"Stop that!" he begged. "Do you want to get us both killed?"

"I'm the only one who can be killed," I muttered.

"Do something—lose him!"

"I'm doing my best!"

The glaring face of the cop was clearly distinguishable despite the darkness. The siren screeched in our ears.

I skidded around the corner on a wheel and a half.

"Listen!" yelled Uncle Magnus.

I listened. Another wail rose to drown out the siren. A great, piercing wail.

At the same moment, the lights on the street abruptly blinked and went out. In the office buildings around us, the windows winked into darkness.

"Don't you understand?" I shouted. "It's a blackout!"

"Blackout?"

"Yes. I'll have to pull to the curb and run for it with you."

"Where to?"

"Must be a downtown air-raid shel-

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ter nearby. If we hide on the street, the wardens will pick us up."

"There's a subway entrance," panted Uncle Magnus. "Now!"

We ground to a halt as the sirens wailed. Leaping from the car, we streaked down the street. Behind us the bewildered cop groped in darkness.

"Halt there!" he bellowed.

"This way," I gasped. I saw the black mouth of a subway entrance loom out of the lesser darkness.

We clattered down the stairs—I with my heels and the skeleton with his bony metatarsae.

"We're safe now," I whispered, pausing on the landing.

It was dark all around us. Somewhere below the crowd stood in dimly-lighted safety.

"Can't go down further," grunted the skeleton. "I don't want to be seen."

"I'm sure nobody would want to look at you," I assured him. "But we're all right here."

Somebody else came racing down the steps and we froze into silence.

From the heavy footsteps I deduced the presence of a stout man.

I nudged the skeleton, who stood close to the wall.

In a moment several pairs of high heels clicked down the stairs. Two girls, I judged, from the tread.

"You all right, Mamie?" giggled the first.

"Okie-dokie by me," her companion replied.

"Gee, ain't blackouts thrilling?" observed the first girl.

"Me, I'd like it better if I had me a sailor," Mamie answered, snapping her gum.

"Any sailors down here?" the other girl tittered.

THE stout man and myself were silent. Uncle Magnus rattled his bones slightly but made no other sign.

"What's the matter, nobody sociable?" complained Mamie. She moved closer in the darkness. Unluckily for her, she moved closer to Uncle Magnus.

"Eeek!" she murmured. "What was that?"

"What?" inquired the other girl.

"I felt something cold."

"Cold?"

"Cold, and—bony," explained the girl, in puzzled tones. Then, "Oh Gawd!"

"What is it?"

"I don't know—it's all bony—like a skeleton!"

"You're screwy!" her companion diagnosed.

"No kidding, I did!" Mamie insisted.

"This is a subway, not a graveyard," scoffed the other girl. "Wait, I'll light a match and see who's getting fresh around here."

"Don't—" I began. But too late.

The match flared up. Uncle Magnus's leering skull stood out.

With a scream duet, the two girls clattered down the stairs to the safety of the subway proper.

In the darkness I heard the stout man chuckle.

"Cute trick," he laughed. "A mask, huh?"

Uncle Magnus was silent at my side. I answered. "Yes, sir. It's a mask. I was on my way to a costume party when the blackout caught us."

The stout man moved closer.

"Say," he boomed. "I know you. You're Tarleton, aren't you?"

"What?" I muttered.

"Sure. Don't you recognize me?"

"Otis Kersen," I muttered. "I thought you were out of town."

"You told me to get out," he said. "But I didn't. Just left word at the office, that's all. After all, there's noth-

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ing to be afraid of, you know. Old Magnus Lorry is safe in his grave, nobody knows anything, you have the estate and we divvy up—"

I turned, but too late. Uncle Magnus had found matches in my pocket.

Otis Kersen saw the full skeleton this time. He screamed.

"In my grave, am I?" groaned Magnus Lorry. "You forget that wizards have power."

"Lorry!" wailed Otis Kersen. "You're back from the dead!"

"Yes," said the skeleton, through clenched teeth. "This young scoundrel was humoring me, dragging me around on a wild goose chase. But I've found my goose and now I'll cook it."

"I'm innocent!" Otis Kersen gasped. "Utterly innocent! He thought up the idea—remember—he came to town secretly and slipped into your house while you slept—he brought a gun—shot you right through the head—we buried you secretly and I faked a medical certificate—he made me do it—"

I TRIPPED on the lower step. That was my biggest mistake. When the skeleton's fingers closed around my throat I knew the end had come.

"All right," he snarled in my ear. "Up we go to the car before the lights turn on." He turned. "You too, Kersen."

"Where are you taking us?" I whispered.

"Home," said the skeleton. "Home. Where my books are. My books with their spells, their incantations. I'm going to show you two a little practical experiment in sorcery."

"What do you mean?"

"You'll see," gloated my skeletonic uncle. "You'll see. Turn about is fair play."

Then I passed out.

When I came to, I was in this bedroom. I'm still here, writing this. Somewhere outside in the great house, a skeleton stalks amidst strange circles, muttering chants. He will be coming for me soon, and for Otis Kersen.

I think I know what he intends.

That's why I'm writing this. To toss it through the window.

If you on the outside find and read this, come to my uncle's house. Magnus Lorry is the name. He probably won't be here—he must have some wizard's plan for a getaway.

Never mind that. Just go to the bedroom closet and open the door. I have a hunch you'll see a skeleton hanging there. That skeleton will be Otis Kersen.

Never mind that, either. But please do something about the other skeleton right next to it. Because—

It's probably me!

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A BLEND OF WOOD AND CEMENT

U. S. McMILLAN, 63, a self-styled "nutty inventor" has come through with a revolutionary idea in construction materials—"Fibercrete." This invention, a mixture of cement and wood, is claimed to be able to save industry millions of tons of steel. "Fibercrete" can be used in building bomb-proof shelters, pillboxes, box cars, runways for airplane fields, and in the construction of battleships!

The invention of Fibercrete seems to be a happy ending to the story of technicians' work for 100 years. For a century, scientists have searched for a successful way of blending cement and wood, a feat thought as difficult as mixing oil and water.

Fibercrete's inventor explains his "inspiration" by saying: "Through an accident I united organic with inorganic substance." A few weeks ago, the technical development section of the War Production Board had more to say about the invention. It blessed it as one of the greatest solutions to the shortage of many metals in production of war materials. Director Robert C. Brown Jr. said:

"Tests have shown that Fibercrete will have many uses. It is light, is heat and water resistant and costs little to manufacture. Because it does not shatter like concrete, it would make an ideal protective shelter against bombs and bullets.

The material looks like concrete, but weighs only half as much and is claimed to be twice as strong. It is about 60 per cent wood and 40 per cent cement. You can nail it, saw it, drill it, but you cannot crack it with a sledgehammer. It is believed to be bombproof and is known to be fireproof—as tested in a 2,000-degree Fahrenheit fire.

The story of the inventor is almost as interesting as the story of the invention. "I'm a nut and I admit it," says McMillan, who lives in Chicago. "I'm an inventor who worked 22 years inventing, that's all." And after 22 years of disappointments, failure, and catastrophe came Fibercrete.

Fibercrete is really an outgrowth of McMillan's first invention 22 years ago. While working as a research man in the lumbering industry, he was horrified one day at the waste in cutting lumber for newsprint pulp.

"I'm still horrified," he adds. "Saw mill operators wasted about 50 per cent of the trees in making pulp—and they still do."

McMillan wanted to help remedy the situation. He started work on a machine that would use at least 90 per cent of a log for pulp, instead of only 50. The result was the "McMillan Defiberizer," a machine that instead of sawing and grinding the wood into pulp, actually combed and carded out the wood fibers from a green log, wasting nothing except the leaves. McMillan claimed that this fiber made excellent pulp at about 75 cents a ton power cost, as against $7.50 a ton—a 90 per cent cost saving.

The machine netted its inventor $50,000. But it was never used. "It would have meant scrapping the industry's present types of machinery and processes, so it was shelved. There were plenty of trees, and the waste went on."

McMillan fought for its use for years, however. He filed tedious law suits, banged on corporation conference tables, lectured before forest conservation groups, and demonstrated his process to anyone who cared to watch. And he continued research with the machine, experimenting daily, and filling thousands of test tubes with the wood fiber.

In 1930, he rented an experimental laboratory on Superior street in Chicago. Here is where his "accident" occurred.

One day, he tossed bundles of fiber into a horizontal drum and tried to soften it by cooking it under 200 pounds of steam-pressure. Nothing resulted—except the problem of cleaning out the cylinder the next day. McMillan tells:

"I intended to toss the fiber into the furnace, but first I looked around the shop for a couple of sacks of sand to use as a scouring agent. There was no sand, so I picked up a couple of bags of cement and tossed them in. After rolling the stuff around a while I dumped the mass into the furnace.

"I went across the street for a bite to eat and when I came back the fire was out. I took it out, added some water to it, and smeared it on the wall. It spread like butter.

"There was a cement finisher working next door. I called him in and had him plaster it on the wall one inch thick. I told him about the mixture.

" 'No,' said he, 'wood and cement won't mix. I've tried it myself. It won't stay put.' "

"But it did stay put. You couldn't crack it with a mallet. I made more and more experiments."

The scientific explanation is that the cells of the fibers, because of the process of cutting, had opened up and had become impregnated with the cement.

In 1933, McMillan received Patent No. 1,907,080 for the Fibercrete invention. Fibercrete was born the same year that Hitler gained power. ". . . and it may help bring the downfall of Hitler."

"It's a war weapon, and the government can have it," says McMillan, "But after the war, it will have even a greater use. We have to rebuild this world, this time permanently. That's where the stuff comes in again. Fibercrete, tests have shown, is three times as strong as brick, and it's cheap. It's within the reach of all. As for lasting, it will last as long as King Tut's tomb.

"That's my dream—to see it help give people decent low-cost housing." Then he adds, "I told you I'm a nut, like all inventors."

He must be modest—for if he's really a nut, we need many more nuts to win this war!

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THE CURIOUS COAT

By DAVID WRIGHT O'BRIEN

WHEN Louie the grifter entered the Plaza bar that evening, his primary motivation was to have a drink, his secondary purpose was to case the joint—just in case there might be some business to pick up.

"Casing" a place, in the jargon of Louie's trade, meant something roughly similar to sizing it up, surveying the lay of the land, or searching for some small, quick, easy and dishonest cash.

So, on this particular night, Louie just happened to be passing by the Plaza bar when he decided to step in and have a look around. The Plaza bar was a fairly respectable bistro, catering to a somewhat monied middle class trade, but not quite snooty enough to enjoy the privilege of barring people of Louie the grifter's caliber so long as they seemed to have enough to pay for their drinks.

Louie was a small, thin, nervous little man with a face closely resembling a little known species of the weasel family. His attire, although it was late autumn and growing definitely chilly, consisted of a too sharply cut, pale gray sharkskin suit and a small-brimmed, somewhat soiled fedora of matching color. His tie, a violent red and purple, matched the color of the tiny, drink-broken veins that marked his small, sharp nose. His shoes were yellow, and the toes of them as needle pointed as his nose.

Louie wore no topcoat—which fact, as you will soon enough perceive, was the start of all the trouble.

Having ignored the disdainful and simultaneously suspicious stare of the doorman presiding at the entrance to the Plaza bar, Louie strolled casually into its soft lighted, deep carpeted cocktail lounge and found a stool at the far end of the bar.

In Louie's pockets jingled innumerable nickels which he had just collected from the pay telephone booths of some dozen public places. These nickels, often as many as sixty of them, constituted Louie's daily grub stake in his grifting, and were obtained by the more or less simple process of removing a small plug of paper from the upper passage of the return coin slots in the various telephones he visited each day. Of course these telephones were worked exclusively by Louie, and were each at definite locations known to him. True also was the fact that Louie himself was the sinful person who stuffed the small paper wads up into the upper passages of the telephone return coin slots each day. It would have been difficult to estimate the number of indignant telephone users who, on getting a busy signal or no answer from the number called, lost

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Louie the grifter slipped this guy a mickey so he could steal his coat. How could he know he was an agent from heaven?

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the nickels which should have been returned to them, thanks to Louie's ingenious paper catch wads.

NOW, as Louie sat at the bar, he contemplatively jingled the nickels in his pocket, while his small, beady black eyes darted back and forth along the bar in shrewd estimate of his chances to pick up a dollar or two in the place.

The bartender came over to Louie, then, and asked, with no noticeable friendliness:

"What'll you have?"

Louie grinned in what he considered to be his most engaging manner. Grinned and revealed small, pointed yellowed teeth which were lavishly interspersed with silver fillings turning black.

"Gimme a beer, pal," Louie said.

The glance the bartender gave Louie showed only too plainly that he had expected anything but a lavish order from the little grifter. He glared at Louie and went away.

The barstools to the right of Louie, three in number, were vacant. Beyond these a small party of middle-aged business men and their wives took up another six stools. Still further on there were several solitary drinkers, a laughing young couple, and a white haired, dinner-jacketed old man.

Louie had noted all this even before he'd taken a seat at the bar. He had noted, too, that the three seats to the right of him were only temporarily vacant, and that their momentarily absent occupants had left cigarettes, small change, and half finished drinks to indicate that they would be back.

Casually, his darting eyes making certain that no one was watching him, Louie took one of the most nearly filled packages of cigarettes and slipped it unconcernedly into his pocket. Then he waited patiently until the bartender returned with his glass of beer.

"Here y'are, Doc," Louie grinned, shoving two nickels across the bar in exchange for the foam-crested beverage.

"Another nickel," the bartender snapped.

Louie looked hurt, then grinned once more, shrugged expansively, and tossed another nickel after the first two. The bartender picked up the three coins in a manner to suggest he suspected they were contaminated, then walked away.

Louie sipped his beer reflectively. Who in the hell did they think they were in this joint? Fifteen cents for beer! But it was good beer, and Louie eased the pangs of his economic prudence by a swift, stealthy gesture which swept up a quarter from the change lying on the bar to his right.

Pulling forth his purloined package of cigarettes, Louie extracted one from the pack and pushed it into the corner of his mouth. Then, using the matches in the ash tray on the bar, he lighted it with casual nonchalance.

He sat there that way, for the next five minutes, puffing reflectively on his cigarette and taking an occasional sip from his beer, while mentally wondering just what the three people who'd deserted the stools to his right were like, and when they'd return.

IT was about this time that the cherubic little man came into the place.

Louie was able to see him enter, from where he sat. And even in his first, sharp, appraising glance, Louie couldn't mistake the little man for what he had obviously been born to be—a sucker.

The little man had a round, apple-ruddy face. His body, dressed unobtrusively in a suit of expensive tailoring and dark tweed, was as proportion-

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ately pudgy as his face. He wore a soft, brown fedora, and carried a handsome camel's hair topcoat on his arm.

Louie decided instantly, from the very timidity of the little man's searching glance toward the bar, that cocktail joints were not his ordinary habitat.

It was when the little man's eyes lighted on the three vacant stools to Louie's right, that Louie lifted his hand casually, indicating the one closest to him, and beckoned, with casual barroom camaraderie, to him.

The little man saw Louie's gesture, blinked at the vacant stools, then nodded brightly and smiled. He came over to the bar.

"Siddown, buddy," Louie invited. "The people who's supposed to be attached to these stools has been away too long. They don't hold no leases on them. Take a seat."

The little man looked uncertainly at Louie.

"Oh, are people sitting here?"

"You are, pal," said Louie, pulling out the barstool closest to him.

"I, ah, really don't think I should," the little man stammered apologetically. "I mean, if people are sitting here."

"Don't give it another thought," Louie said. "When they come back they'll hafta find another stool, that's all."

"I don't want to cause anyone any trouble," the little man protested feebly. "I am rather nearsighted, and when you waved to me to indicate these vacant seats, I had no idea that someone might have deserted them temporarily."

Louie put his hand on the little man's arm, practically forcing him to the stool.

"S'awright. Ferget it," he said.

The little man, obviously against his better judgment, timidly took the stool beside Louie.

There was a moment of silence, and then the little man cleared his throat nervously.

"You were very kind," he said.

"Think nothing of it," Louie said grandly. "Say, you better put that coat on the hangar over there. Here, lemme take it for you."

The little man, at that moment, had been holding his very rich camel's hair coat on his lap. He seemed startled by Louie's suggestion.

"Ah, I, uh—no. That is, no, thank you. I'd rather not," the little man protested.

"You'll suffacate yerself with that on your lap," Louie declared, grabbing for the coat. "Don't be silly. I'll hang it up for you. The coat rack's right over there, where we can see it and keep an eye on it. You don't hafta worry about its getting stole in this joint."

"It, uh, isn't that so much," the little man protested. "It, uh, is just that this coat means a l—"

LOUIE cut him off, grabbing the coat completely from the little man's grasp. He grinned and slapped the little man on the back.

"Don't worry about nothing," he said cheerfully. "I'll hang this up right now." He got off his barstool, the other's coat in his hands. "And say, while I'm hanging this coat up for you, you can order us a couple drinks on me, huh?"

"Really, sir," the little man said bewilderedly, "I can't permit you to purchase my drink. You've been too kind already. I insist that I treat."

"G'wan," said Louie with great goodheartedness and a resounding slap on the little man's back. "You struck me right off as being a stranger here in town, and I always wanta show

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strangers how first rate this burg of ours is." He paused, then added, sharply, "You *are* a stranger here in town, ain't you?"

The little man now looked additionally bewildered.

"Why, ah, yes. Yes I am. Yes, you might very well call me a stranger here in town," he spluttered.

"Fine!" Louie the grifter exclaimed enthusiastically. "That's just fine!"

Louie was feeling considerably pleased with the prospects for this evening when he walked over to hang the little man's topcoat on the coat rack in the corner. This looked like more than a little bit of an easy roll.

After carefully hanging the little man's topcoat so that it was out of sight of their places at the bar, Louie returned to his unwitting victim.

He found the little man talking to the bartender.

"Ah, there, palsie," Louie beamed, "how about that drink on me?"

The look which the bartender flashed at Louie was most definitely hostile and suspicious. But Louie ignored him.

"What're you drinking, palsie?" he asked the little man.

"I had thought that a glass of beer —" began the little fellow.

"A beer for the gent," said the grifter, cutting him off. "And you might make that a shot of the twenty year old Scotch for me."

The bartender's suspicion was now pronounced. He looked from Louie to the little man, started to say something, closed his mouth and went off for the drinks.

The little man picked up the thread of a previous theme. Pleadingly, he addressed Louie the grifter.

"I wish, sir, that you would let me stand treat on this drink that is coming. It is only fair. You have been so kind that—"

Louie cut him off with an expansive wave of his hand and an elaborate shrug of his shoulders.

"Okay, palsie," Louie said resignedly. "If you insist, the treat'll be on you."

The little man beamed his thanks with his eyes, and at that instant the bartender appeared with the drinks—beer for the little man and a bottle of twenty-year-old Scotch and a shot glass for the grifter.

"My friend," smiled the little man, "has consented to permit me to treat for this drink."

"If you think that comes as a surprise," said the bartender coldly, "you're wrong."

LOUIE raised his eyebrows in lofty disdain at that remark, ceremoniously pouring himself a shot of the twenty-year-old Scotch. He raised his glass to the little man.

"Regahds," said Louie.

The little man had been fumbling for his wallet. Now he put it hastily on the bar and lifted his glass of beer.

"To your good health, sir," he answered.

In silence, the grifter downed the shot and the little man sipped his beer. Then, putting his glass on the bar and picking up his wallet again, the little man began a probe for a bill. Louie, while appearing utterly disinterested, furtively cased the wallet. To his trained eye it seemed as though there wasn't much more than twenty dollars in the wallet.

Louie felt a sharp twinge of disappointment. He'd expected to find the little sucker packing a big wad. But twenty bucks was twenty bucks, and such easy money didn't hang around under a grifter's nose every day.

Quickly, as the little guy shoved a five dollar bill across the bar, Louie

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sorted through his mind for an excuse to get his sucker out of the Plaza bar and to some disreputable bar where he could slip a powder in the foam of his beer.

It was as the bartender walked away to make the change for the five dollar bill that Louie brought forth his suggestion.

"Say," he said with impulsive gaiety, "this place stinks."

The little man looked properly stunned. He sniffed several times bewilderedly.

"I—I am afraid that I do not quite understand you, sir," he confessed.

Louie elaborated.

"This joint has no life," he said. "A guy could curl up onna bar and doze off, it's so dead."

The little man looked around. "I hadn't noticed," he admitted. "I thought it seemed rather festive."

"Hah!" Louie came in with his clinching sales talk. "That's just because you're a stranger in this town, palsie. This town has joints that make this place seem like a rest ward inna sanitarium. Whatcha say we blow this place and I'll show you some of them places?"

The little man looked properly regretful. He shook his head sadly but firmly.

"I appreciate your efforts to be kind, sir," he said. "But I cannot—indeed, dare not—imbibe more than this glass of beer tonight. I confess, I sort of sneaked in here for just one glass of beer when I really should have been about my business. No, I'm afraid I must regretfully refuse your very kind invitation."

Louie hadn't expected this. The sucker had given the wrong answer. But he had still an ace up his sleeve. He leaned forward and whispered in the little man's ear.

The little man crimsoned to the roots of his hair. He seemed suddenly painfully embarrassed. Louie sniggered and nudged him in the ribs with his thumb.

"How does that sound to you, palsie?" Louie leered.

"I, uh, er, that is—" the little man floundered.

"Knockout lookers, they are," Louie cut in.

The little man had finally gained enough composure to answer.

"I am very sorry," he said a trifle stiffly, "but such pursuits of sinful pleasure would not interest me."

LOUIE'S jaw fell agape. Momentarily, he was left without a comeback. This little guy was all of a sudden giving out with nothing but wrong answers. Louie forced a mechanical, good-natured grin to his weasel-like face.

"I didn't mean no offense, chum," Louie began swiftly. "It's every man to his own likes, I allus say."

But the little man was getting down from the barstool even as Louie spoke.

"Hey," Louie exclaimed. "You ain't leaving?"

The little man shook his head. "Not until I have finished my beer," he said, pointing to the almost full glass still on the bar. "It is just that I find it suddenly expedient to—" and he leaned forward and whispered in Louie's ear.

"Oh," Louie was relieved. "You'll find it straight ahead and around the first corner to the right."

The little man nodded gratefully. "Thank you, sir," he said. He moved off rapidly on the course Louie had charted for him.

It was then that the bartender, seeing the temporary leave-taking of the little man, came quickly over to where Louie sat.

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"Okay, pal," said the bartender. "You ain't fooling anybody. Shove off."

Louie's jaw fell agape indignantly. "Huh?"

"You heard me," said the bartender. "You're a mooch and a cheap grifter. We don't want guys like you cluttering up this place. Skate outta here before I call the bounce man."

Louie stared angrily at the bartender for a moment. Mechanically, he picked up the change left on the bar from the little man's bill. As he did so, he held the bartender's glance with his own, so that the adroit maneuver passed utterly unnoticed.

"If you're taking that attitoot," said Louie loftily, "I shall take my business elsewhere." He pocketed the little man's change, three bills and some silver.

"Don't dally, bum," said the bartender.

Slowly, to indicate that he wasn't going to rush for anyone, Louie limbed off his barstool. From the corner of his mouth there slipped an entirely indecent rejoinder.

Then, as the bartender purpled in rage, Louie walked slowly, with insulting leisure, toward the exit, carefully picking his way past tables and booths so that the coatrack on which he had hung the little man's topcoat was easily accessible.

It was a simple matter to reach out with one hand and sweep the obviously expensive camel's hair coat from the rack and curl it under one arm while he passed by. And Louie knew that, from where the wrathful bartender watched, the theft could not be seen. Nor did it cause any attention from the tables and booths of guests near the coat rack. After all, hadn't they seen Louie hang the coat up in the first place?

ONCE outside the Plaza bar, Louie started rapidly along the street until he had put several blocks between himself and the scene of his operations. Only then did the grifter slow down to take stock.

In the fifteen or twenty minutes Louie had spent in the Plaza bar he had accumulated one package of free smokes, two-bits change left by temporarily absent guests, one shot of twenty-year-old Scotch, three dollars and ninety-five cents change left from the five dollar bill of the little man, and one obviously valuable topcoat which had been the property of the little man. Against this profit he mentally wrote off the fifteen cents operating expenses of the beer he'd had to buy.

On the whole, Louie felt more than satisfied. Of course, he'd counted at first on getting the little guy out of there and taking him to a dive where he could slip him a Mickey, then to an alley where he could roll him for his wallet. But still, the grift he had accomplished was pretty fair compensation for the alteration the sharp-eyed bartender had put in his plans.

"Not so bad," Louie mused. "Not so bad at all."

Louie now began a careful inspection of the purloined topcoat. He did this leisurely, and with practiced skill. Though he found no label on the inside of the coat to indicate where it had been purchased, Louie was still aware that it was a valuable garment. He estimated that it must have set the little guy back several hundred bucks when he purchased it, which couldn't have been long ago.

Mentally, Louie went through percentage arithmetic, arriving at the figure that Arthur, the fence for stolen goods, would pay him the following day for the garment. Twenty dollars, anyway, twenty-five, if Louie held back.

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The tallying of this neat profit to his operations in the Plaza bar gave Louie a warm, happy feeling. Even if he'd rolled the little guy as he had planned, he couldn't have cleared more than sixteen, eighteen bucks on it. But of course, had he given the little guy a Mickey and rolled him, he could have taken the coat too.

Louie shrugged this off, however, with a philosophical observation.

"What the hell?" he told himself. "It don't pay to be too greedy."

Continuing his inspection of the topcoat, Louie discovered nothing more save a small, neatly printed card which contained merely one name.

"Mr. J. Joy," was the name on the card.

Louie looked the card over carefully a minute, memorized the name, then tore it into tiny fragments and let them flutter to the sidewalk.

"J. Joy, eh?" Louie mused contemplatively. "Probably the little guy's name. What a monicker! Wonder how he came by such a handle?"

Louie sighed and gave up trying to figure out how anyone could come by such a handle. He turned his attention back to thoughts of business, and a craftsman-like enthusiasm flooded him. This looked like the start of a big night, a very big night. When Louie had especially good nights, they generally started off right, like this one.

FOR a moment Louie debated on a choice of his next stopping place. There were more bars similar to the Plaza in this neck of the woods, but his instinct told him that it might be wise to lay off such bistros for a bit and concentrate on the sucker trade in the cheap, frowsy clip-joint belt just three blocks east of this neighborhood. There, in the precincts of innumerable small-fry "night spots," reeking, firetrap saloons boasting dollar minimum charges and entertainment loosely labeled "floor shows," Louie could vie with the proprietors of these establishments in clipping customers who thought themselves slumming.

Louie had long had a fondness for such places. Suckers with dough who patronized them were generally in a psychological spot when they were clipped, no matter how brutally, inasmuch as any protest on their part might result in nasty police-to-newspaper messes which would reveal to their friends and neighbors that they'd descended to the depths of such dives for entertainment.

One sucker who didn't dare squawk, in Louie's book of trade homilies, was worth a hundred who turned into cop-hollerers.

It occurred to Louie, as he started off toward this cheap night life district, that he could even afford the well earned luxury of relaxing for a half hour or so in one of those places before getting back to business. What the hell, he thought virtuously, I've worked hard and deserve a breather. Besides, the night was starting off three lengths ahead of the field. . . .

THUS it was that Louie the grifter found himself in one of his favorite clip-belt "night spots" some ten minutes later, seated at a corner table with a bottle of beer in front of him while he watched the unclad writhings of a hennaed, hoarse-voiced damsel strutting and stripping back and forth across the postage-stamp clearance before an elevated bandstand.

Louie's spindle legs were thrust forward from his chair in an attitude of delicious relaxation, and his beady eyes followed the contortions of the dumpy danseuse appreciatively, while his left hand drummed rhythmic ac-

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companiment to the hideous cacophony emitted by an off-key but enthusiastic four-piece orchestra.

This, to Louie, was the spice of life. It could be said truthfully of him that, were he to inherit a million dollars within the next ten minutes, he would use it merely to further his prestige in circles such as this. In his enjoyment of the finer vices, Louie was pathetically limited by his imagination.

Nevertheless, so long as it didn't seem that he stood any chance of inheriting a million dollars, Louie's conscience would allow for only just so much of this wasteful relaxation. He'd been in the cheap night spot little longer than twenty minutes when his conscience began needling him at his idleness, and his darting, beady little eyes went back to work.

There was a party of slummers at a table some ten feet away from Louie's. Two boisterously drunk, middle-aged business men, and two bleached damsels who looked neither like their secretaries nor their wives.

There was a gaiety and hilarity and friendliness in the attitude of the two middle-aged businessmen that suggested possibilities to Louie. And too, they purchased drinks for their table with lavish indifference to the outrageous prices which had undoubtedly been especially established for their benefit by the clip-conscious management.

Louie sat there awhile, indexing through his mind to find a grift which would be suitable to the occasion.

He thought of the "Pardon me, pal, but ain't you from Kansas City?" opening, and discarded it, inasmuch as the two prospective victims didn't seem to be strangers to the town.

He gave careful thought to numerous other approaches, discarding each for one reason or another. The briefly entertained idea of buying them a round of drinks with his compliments, he shudderingly eliminated at the realization that the management was probably doubling the check on the suckers, and that they were all drinking hard liquor.

At length, however, he selected his opening and, satisfied that it was the best, rose from his table and went to the washroom. There he killed a few moments, permitted himself to have his shoes and clothes brushed by the attendant, and, with exceptional largess, tipped the chap a nickel.

On coming from the washroom, of course, Louie had to pass the table of his prospective victims to get to his own. And in passing that table he managed to stumble into the back of the chair in which one of the middle-aged businessmen sat.

Profuse in his apologies, Louie clapped that gentleman heartily on the back as a gesture of fraternal acknowledgement that there would be no hard feelings on either side, and started again toward his table.

THEN, two strides away from their table, he stopped sharply, and with an exclamation, turned back to the gentleman whose chair he had jarred and whose back he had slapped.

"Say," Louie exclaimed in excited discovery, "ain't you George Spelvin?"

The gentleman at whom Louie had pointed his finger looked surprised. Then he shook his head and admitted that he was not George Spelvin.

Louie peered long and hard at him, as if searching his memory, then shook his head sadly.

"No," Louie said, "I guess you ain't. Awful sorry, pal, but you certainly are a ringer for George Spelvin. Why,

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say, you could easy be his twin, you look that much like him. He was big, a powerful guy, and distinguished looking like you," Louie added, with an obvious vanity bait.

"Ish zat so?" said the businessman, enormously pleased. He looked proudly at the bleached blonde beside him. "Hear that, baby? Thish fella saysh I look lie a guy he ushta know."

The other business man broke in, then, cordially effusive.

"Have a drink wish ush, fella? Gotta have a drink on sush a conish-dunce! Pulluppa chair."

"Shure thing," said the first by way of seconding an excellent spur-of-the-moment comradeship. "Pulluppa chair!"

Louie exposed his unlovely dental work in a delighted grin. He reached for a chair at a vacant table to his right. It was then that one of the bleached damsels entered the conversation. She was closest of the four to Louie, and she spoke in a voice clear enough to carry to the little grifter's ears without being heard by the others.

"Ixnay, umbay," she hissed through a red smile. "You poach on our territory and I'll scratch bloody holes in the place your eye sockets usta be!"

Louie suddenly paled. He hadn't foreseen this. He wondered how his intentions had been so crystal clear to the blonde, then realized that grifting—though of a slightly different sort—was her line also.

He smiled a sick, mechanical smile, while his darting eyes flicked to the other blonde and perceived that she unquestionably shared her sister-in-clip's sentiments on the matter of poaching.

"Heh-heh," Louie grunted weakly, "I'd like to, fellas, but I gotta be finishing my beer back at my table, then getting on. Thanks just the same."

He went quickly back to his own table, then, the protests of the two businessmen dying in the sudden bright chatter of their blonde companions.

Sullenly, Louie sat down before his half-finished bottle of beer and mentally wrote off a total loss of a nickel spent in the washroom on the strength of that mismanaged deal.

He was thus moodily embittered when he saw the little guy walk into the place.

The same little guy, the one named J. Joy, whose topcoat was at the moment hanging on a hook above Louie's wall table.

INSTINCTIVELY, Louie started to rise from his chair, eyes searching for the nearest exit, one hand ready to grab the topcoat for his flight.

And then Louie perceived that little Mr. J. Joy was quite alone. The big, blue uniformed figure which Louie had confidently expected to see in the wake of little Mr. Joy was not there. Louie was flooded with sudden relief at the thought that the little guy had not hollered copper.

Little Mr. Joy stood blinking near-sightedly beside the bar near the front door, peering at the customers who lined it, and then at the tables around the dance floor in the rear.

Louie hesitated uncertainly, suspiciously. How had the little guy figured he'd be here? And what in the name of hell did the little guy figure it would get him to go searching for Louie alone and without the help of a copper?

Louie's little pig eyes flashed again to the wake of little Mr. Joy, but there was no copper present. Not even a guy who looked like a flattie from the plainclothes detail.

Now little Mr. Joy was moving slowly in his direction. Louie saw a waiter advance to him and ask him a

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question. The little man shook his head embarrassedly and gave an answer that must have had something in it about looking for someone.

The waiter stepped back to let little Mr. Joy pass, but kept an eagle eye on him as the little man advanced timidly nearer to the section where Louie waited watchfully.

The fact of the little man's aloneness, and therefore helplessness, had now been accepted by Louie, and the thought amused him considerably. He made a sudden decision, and resumed his seat, eyes still on the advancing Mr. Joy.

Then the little man spied him, and an expression more of ecstatic relief than of anger crossed his pudgy, cherubic features. He hurried over toward Louie's table, breathlessly excited.

Calmly, Louie regarded the little man's approach, until at last Mr. Joy stood directly before him, puffing heavily as he sought for words.

"What you want?" Louie asked belligerently.

Little Mr. Joy caught his breath at last.

"Oh my, you don't know how relieved I am to have found you, sir. I have looked in almost every drinking place in a radius of five blocks from the Plaza bar."

So that was how the little guy had found him? It had just been a matter of luck. Louie felt even more belligerently confident.

"Okay," he said harshly. "So now you caught up with me. What you want, huh?"

"My topcoat," said the little man. "I must ask you to give back my topcoat. When I'd found that it was missing from the coat rack where you'd placed it, some people at a table nearby told me that a person of your description had walked out with it. I am sure you made a mistake, sir, and intended to take your own coat, but took mine instead. If you will return to the Plaza bar you will undoubtedly find your own hanging there."

LOUIE stared at the little man incredulously. Was it possible that it had never entered the little mugg's noodle that someone would heist his topcoat? Louie found it hard to believe. And yet, there was an expression of utter guilelessness in the little man's eyes that belied the possibility of any other explanation. Then, too, such naivete fitted perfectly into the explanation of the little guy's appearance without a copper.

Lighting a cigarette to hide the grin he couldn't repress, Louie made a quick decision as to how he would handle this little jerk. He waved to a chair on the other side of the table.

"Siddown, palsie," he invited.

Little Mr. Joy started to sit down, then midway in the process, paused to ask excitedly:

"Then you do have my coat? You were the one who took it by mistake?"

Louie jerked his thumb upward to indicate the coat hanging on the wall peg above their table.

"There it is, palsie," he said.

The little man dropped into the chair with a sigh of relief at the sight of his topcoat.

"Thank goodness," he gasped. "Oh, thank goodness!" The grateful glance he bestowed on Louie the grifter was brimming with joyous tears.

"Does the benny mean that much to you?" Louie asked.

"What?" the little man blinked.

"The body-wrap, the topcoat, does it mean that much to you?" Louie amplified.

"Oh, my!" the little man exclaimed. "Oh, my, you have no idea how much it

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means to me, sir. If I were to tell you, I—" and quite suddenly little Mr. Joy clapped his hand over his mouth, cutting off the rest of his sentence. He gave Louie a look of dismay.

"Whatsa matter?" the grifter demanded.

"I'm sorry, sir," said little Mr. Joy. "I almost disclosed information which would be most indiscreet to reveal."

Louie frowned suspiciously at this.

"Information such as what?" he asked sharply.

"About the topcoat," blurted Mr. Joy, and then, again, clamped his pudgy little hand across his mouth in a gesture of dismay. "Oh, my," he gasped. "In my excitement I have quite lost control of my tongue, I'm afraid."

Louie felt a sudden surge of irritation toward the little man's secretiveness. Something was rotten about that topcoat somehow, that much he now sensed. But what? What could the little jerk be blabbing about?

Suddenly the frown left Louie's brow and a Cheshire smirk twisted the corners of his small, thin-lipped mouth. He had a pretty good idea of what was up. He had a damned good hunch about that topcoat, now. A hunch that told him maybe there was some dough, heavy sugar, sewed up in the lining of the garment. Louie had known people to hide their money that way before. Once he'd heisted the coat of an old scrubwoman in a restaurant and found three hundred bucks that must have been her life's savings sewed in the lining.

And now that Louie felt pretty certain of his knowledge, he sat back and eyed little Mr. Joy with the appraisal of a feline toward a mouse.

THIS was perfect. This was the realization of his hunch that this would be a banner night for Louie the grifter. Little Mr. Joy didn't look like the kind of a squirrel who'd hide peanuts in the lining of that coat. If there were dough in there, and Louie now felt certain there was, it would be in big bills. Nice chunks of folding money. Maybe as much as a grand, or better.

Louie beckoned to a waiter, who hurried over to the table.

"A bottle of beer for this gent," he ordered, "and a double slug of Scotch for me."

Mr. Joy, as the waiter left, opened his mouth as if to protest, but Louie cut him off.

"You can have a drink on me, palsie," he said, "before you take your coat and leave. I feel I've putcha to a lotta trouble, and I wanta make up for it, see?"

Mr. Joy smiled apologetically. "Your attitude has been consistently kind and gentlemanly, sir. I don't know how I can ever repay you."

"Skip it," said Louie modestly. "But if you wanta do me a favor you can explain why you is so attached to that benny, I mean topcoat, of yours. You didn't look like no guy who lost an ordinary topcoat when you come busting into here."

The little man looked indecisive. He bit his underlip worriedly. There was fully a minute of silence. Louie waited, cat-like, to see what phony yarn the little guy would cook up to explain the extra value of the coat.

In the interval, the waiter came to the table with a bottle of beer for Mr. Joy and a double Scotch for Louie. He set the glasses before them and left.

"Well?" Louie demanded. "Doncha wanta tell me?"

Little Mr. Joy took a deep breath, then exhaled it in an explosive burst of confidence.

"It is against all the rules, sir. But under the circumstances, I think I can disregard instructions this once. I shall

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tell you, sir. Yes, I shall."

Louie hid a smirk behind a clawlike hand, his beady eyes cynically mirroring the deceit he was confident was coming. Then he stretched the smirk into a between-the-two-of-us grin which he displayed to Mr. Joy.

"Shoot, palsie," said Louie.

Little Mr. Joy, after one last moment of indecision, began. He talked quickly, earnestly, in a low, conspiratorial tone.

"Remember, sir," said little Mr. Joy, "when you remarked that I seemed to be a stranger here in town?" He didn't wait for the answer to this question but continued rapidly. "Remember, too, my saying that I was rather a stranger? Well, sir, your remark was far more significant than you suspected. I am not only a stranger to this town, sir, but I am also what you might call a stranger to this *world.*" He paused dramatically, eyes searching Louie's face eagerly to see if the proper implications of that statement had registered on his auditor.

Louie the grifter met Mr. Joy's gaze with a hard, impassive stare. Though the little man did not perceive it in Louie's face, the grifter was doing an excellent job of concealing a two-fold reaction to Mr. Joy's incredible statement. Louie's first thought had been: "Is this little jerk nuts?" and his second: "Or is he sap enough to think I'm nuts?"

"Did you clearly understand the implications of my statement, sir?" Mr. Joy asked anxiously.

LOUIE had by this time come to the conclusion that he had been somewhat correct in both of his first reactions. The little jerk was probably a trifle off his trolley, and probably nuts enough to imagine Louie was nuts also.

"Sure," said Louie impassively. "I got the drift. Go right ahead. Tell me more." Louie had by now decided that if the little guy was batty it made it even more certain that there was a wad of dough sewed up in his topcoat's lining. Screwy-blooies hid their money that way.

"Good," said Mr. Joy. "I was afraid you might be skeptical. There are few humans who aren't." He took another deep breath and went on. "You see, sir, I do not belong to this world. I am an insignificant member of the world beyond this world. I am, in fact, a Heavenly Employee."

"Is that right?" Louie said tonelessly.

Little Mr. Joy nodded eagerly. "Precisely, sir. I am a Heavenly Employee, one of an incredible number of Heavenly Employees who carry out innumerable jobs There and on earth, here."

"That's very interesting," observed Louie the grifter.

Again little Mr. Joy nodded eagerly, face aglow. "Yes, indeed, it certainly is. As a Heavenly Employee, furthermore, I am one of a number of Special Agents assigned to various territories in this world of yours. My territory includes this state and four adjacent states."

Louie the grifter was still managing to keep a poker face.

"It must keep you pretty busy, huh?" he asked.

"Oh, yes, it does," agreed the little man. "You see my job as Special Agent in this territory, as my name indicates, is the spreading of joy where there is unhappiness and tears."

"Well, well," said Louie, "ain't that a nice job, though!"

Little Mr. Joy beamed. "Oh, my yes. It surely is. There are many other Special Agents in other territories who do the same work as I do, and none of us would trade jobs with agents on other assignments for a minute. Well, to continue, you now

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understand where I am from and what my job consists of, you can no doubt understand also why it was necessary for me and other Special Heavenly Agents working in this world to assume human form."

"Sure," said Louie solemnly. "Sure. So you could look just like the rest of us humans, huh?"

"That's it!" exclaimed little Mr. Joy delightedly. "Otherwise our appearances would be much too conspicuous to be practical for our work. We would, I am sure, cause far too much alarm to enable us to do our work quietly and efficiently. Do you follow me so far?"

"Sure," Louie assured him. "I'm way ahead of you. You don't seem no different from any other human beans on account of you don't *want* to seem different. But what about the ben—, I mean, topcoat?"

"I was just coming to that," said the little man eagerly. "You see, we work an eight hour day when we're here on earth. There are two other agents in this territory who do the same work as I do. Each takes one of the other two shifts so that there is always an agent on duty, every hour of the day and night."

"That's good," said Louie. "I was worried there for a minute."

"Oh, yes," said Mr. Joy. "One of us is always on the job. But there's the catch."

Louie blinked. "The catch?"

"Yes, don't you see? When we are on the job our work is of such a nature that we cannot afford, under any circumstances to be seen by the humans among whom we move. The human bodies we wear of necessity during the sixteen hours when we are not working, are flesh and blood, and therefore visible. Being visible during our working hours just wouldn't do," the little man declared emphatically.

"Yeah," said Louie impatiently, "I can see you gotta tough problem there. But where does the topcoat come in?"

"The topcoat," exclaimed Mr. Joy happily, "is our solution to the problem. Each of us was issued a special topcoat, such as mine there hanging on the wall. During our working hours, when it is necessary to be invisible, we merely don the topcoat over our necessary human bodies and, presto—no one can see us!"

LOUIE the grifter stared contemptuously a full minute at the eager little man. This clinched it. This was final proof that the little jerk was nuttier than a package of pecans.

"Well, well," Louie remarked at last. "Ain't that somepin!"

"Yes, isn't it clever?" little Mr. Joy said proudly. "Then, when our working shift is through, we merely remove the coat and become visible again."

"So that's why you was so anxious to find your topcoat, eh?" concluded Louie with thinly disguised contempt.

"Exactly, sir," said the little man. "Now you can understand my anxiety. You see, I might have borrowed a coat from one of the agents on the two other shifts in this territory, except that it would have been a poor fit. You see, they were given bodies of a size different from mine."

Now that the little man had thoroughly presented the proof of his insanity, Louie was impatient to get rid of him and get at the lining of that coat. Louie was certain even more than before that the nitwit had at least a couple of grand in a private booby bank beneath the lining. The thought made his fingers itch.

"That was plenty interesting, palsie," Louie said suddenly. "And you can be sure I won't blab a word about it to

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nobody else. I'll keep every word of it on the confidential."

"I hope you will, sir," said the little man. "Except for the unusual circumstances I would never have told you. If you were to spread what I have disclosed, it would do untold harm to our work. We can't have that happen."

"No," said Louie, reaching for Mr. Joy's glass and unpoured bottle of beer, "you can't have nothing like that happen to ruin your racket. Here, you ain't even tasted your drink. I'll pour it for you, and we'll have a drink together on the lucky fact you found your topcoat again."

As Louie the grifter poured Mr. Joy's beer from the bottle into the glass, he dexterously emptied the knockout powder from the small paper he'd concealed in his palm. The powder rested easily and unnoticeably in the collar of foam at the top of the glass.

Louie handed the glass to little Mr. Joy.

"Here y'are, palsie," he said, raising his Scotch in a toast. "Here's to the good luck we both got tonight, huh?" Louie fought back a smirk at what he considered to be an exquisitely ironic salutation.

"Yes indeed, sir," said little Mr. Joy, raising his glass aloft. "Here's to your health!"

Louie held his glass half an inch from his mouth, looking steadily at the little man as he took a short, quick draught from his glass of beer.

A WRY expression of distaste came to Mr. Joy's cherubic features, and he seemed momentarily about to gag on the liquid he swallowed. He planked his glass down on the table quickly, coughing, his face growing green, then ashen.

Strickenly, Mr. Joy looked up into the smirking face of Louie the grifter.

"Whatsa matter, palsie? Don't you feel good?" Louie said mockingly.

Mr. Joy's eyes were suddenly heavy lidded. There was a white ring around his mouth, and he groaned feebly.

Louie the grifter laughed harshly. And then Mr. Joy put his head in his arms and his arms on the table. His faint groans came mufflledly to the grifter.

Pushing back his chair from the table, Louie rose and went around to where the little man sat. Before trying to lift Mr. Joy's head from his arms, Louie located the little man's wallet. He pocketed this, then, and grabbed the little man by the hair, jerking his head up so that he could see his face.

Mr. Joy was still conscious, though very foggily so, and quite desperately in the throes of nausea. His complexion was a soupy, pea green.

Louie laughed, turned and waved to a passing waiter. The waiter hurried over to the table.

"Whatsa trouble?" he demanded suspiciously, glaring down at little Mr. Joy.

"This guy," said Louie, "musta had too much to drink even before he came in here. One beer done this to him."

The waiter took another look at Mr. Joy, then at Louie the grifter. But if he had any doubts as to how Mr. Joy had arrived at such a condition, he kept them to himself. He nodded agreement.

"He's gonna be pretty damn sick in another minute," said the waiter, "and I don't wanta hafta clean up the mess."

"Then toss him out in the alley," Louie suggested with utter indifference. "He's no friend of mine. I never seen him before until I asked him to have a drink. Such people you got coming into this place!"

"Whatta bout the check?" the waiter demanded.

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"Gimme it," said Louie, extracting little Mr. Joy's wallet from his pocket.

The waiter presented the bill, Louie glanced at it, took two dollar bills from Mr. Joy's fund of fifteen remaining dollars, and handed them carelessly to the waiter.

"Keep the change," Louie said nonchalantly.

The waiter looked at him scornfully. "All fifteen cents of it?" he asked bitterly.

"Sure," said Louie, reaching up to remove Mr. Joy's topcoat from the wall peg. He turned then, with the coat draped over one arm, and sauntered toward the door.

Behind him, he heard the waiter's flood of obscenity as he began the process of carrying an inert Mr. Joy to a rear entrance as a preliminary necessity to dumping the little man into the alley.

Louie grinned yellowly to himself, nodded to the shabbily uniformed doorman and bouncer of the tawdry bistro, and stepped out into the street.

NOW the itching excitement to get immediately to some secluded place where he could rip loose the lining of the coat and plunder the little man's booby bank became almost unbearable to the grifter.

He looked up and down the street in search of a deserted doorway or a convenient alley, then wondered if it might not be wiser to control his impatience and wait until he returned to his dingy hotel room before starting the search.

For perhaps half a minute Louie the grifter stood there on the sidewalk in front of the cheap night spot he'd just left, debating a course of action as his always darting eyes moved restlessly up and down the street.

It was then he saw the copper. The copper was just an ordinary beat patrolman, casually sauntering up the street to the rhythmic swing of his nightstick, but the sight of him was enough to bring a nervous flutter to Louie's stomach.

Louie watched the copper moving leisurely in his direction and realized that his unprecedented nervousness at the sight of the uniform was due only to the fact that he was on the verge of the biggest clean-up in all his experience as a small time grifter. Louie realized this, but was nevertheless unable to quiet the flutter. Supposing the cop got suspicious of something, or just didn't happen to like Louie's face?

Louie tried to look unconcerned. He steeled himself against a wild impulse to run. With hands that trembled, he fumbled for a cigarette and clumsily managed to light it.

The cop was now less than half a block away. Louie didn't dare move, for fear of doing something that would betray his alarm to the eyes of the copper.

And at that instant Louie realized how additionally conspicuous he must look standing there in the late autumn chill with a topcoat under his arm instead of on his back.

Cursing under his breath, Louie took the coat from under his arm and started to put it on. Fortunately, aside from weight, he and the little guy had been approximately the same size.

In his first effort to shrug into the coat, it slipped from Louie's unsteady fingers and fell to the sidewalk. Now utterly shaken, Louie grabbed it up wildly and managed, in his second effort, to don the garment.

Jerkily, Louie half turned to see if the copper had noticed. There was no question about it. The copper had noticed all right, and he was less than sixty feet away, coming directly toward the trembling little grifter, his cold, blue eyes fixed on Louie!

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WITH a cursing sob, Louie looked wildly left and right for possible avenues of flight or refuge. He turned back toward the copper once more, just long enough to meet the scowling, frightening glare of the officer's stern appraisal.

Wildly, Louie took to his heels and ran, his breath ragged and burning in his thin, terror-filled chest. The pounding of his own feet on the sidewalk drowned out every other sound from his hysteria-deafened eardrums.

He was barely conscious of reaching the corner, scarcely aware that he rounded it at breakneck speed, utterly oblivious to the fact that an alleyway entrance was less than fifty feet away.

It was at the alleyway entrance that Louie slipped on a small patch of oil—smear left by some recently drained truck crankcase. His legs shot out from under him, and there was a horrible moment in which his arms flailed nothingness. And then he landed jarringly, sickeningly on the solid cobblestones of the alley, his head cracking sharply against them.

In a daze of pain and terror, Louie tried to sit up. His head was swimming, his skull aching.

The huge headlights blinded him a moment later. The headlights of a mammoth freight truck moving slowly out of the alley and directly toward Louie.

Louie tried to rise. Tried to get out of the way of that truck bearing down on him with such hideous, inexorable might. He tried to rise, but the paralysis of fear had frozen him. He shouted, then. Shouted desperately. But the breath had left his lungs and his shout was a choking, inaudible wheeze.

Wildly, in the glare of those huge headlights, Louie waved his arms. Surely they'd see him! They had to! They had to! There was plenty of time for them to jam on the brakes as soon as they saw him!

Louie's scrawny frame scarcely jarred the giant truck as it rolled ponderously over him, pulping bones and flesh into the cobblestones of the alley.

The driver of the truck and his assistant were but faintly aware of the soft bump they went over. They mentioned it most briefly.

"S'funny," the driver remarked, "I didn't see no bump in them cobblestones."

His assistant yawned. "Neither did I," he said. "I was watching close, on accounta possible crates with nails. I didn't see nothing at all."

As far as they were concerned, that closed the incident. It closed the incident, too, that might have been labeled "The Life and Times of Louie the Grifter."

It can be presumed, of course, that a sadly disillusioned little gentleman named Mr. Joy was eventually successful in putting a request through the Heavenly Supply-Room for another coat. . . .

TWINKLE TALK

WHEN you look up into the sky at night, you see many "stars," don't you? Some of these twinkle and some do not. In a general way, we are told that these "stars" are really planets and stars—the planets do not twinkle while the stars do.

Why don't planets twinkle like stars? Scientists say the twinkling of stars is caused by irregularities in the density of the air through which the light passes. Because of its great distance from the earth, a star is optically a point, while a planet, because of its relative proximity to the earth, is a disk.

In the case of the planet, the various points on the disk do not "keep step" in their twinkling. Some are bright, while others are faint. Thus, the amount of light received by the eye at any instant is always much nearer the average light than in the case of the star.

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STORY OF THE SMYRNA FIG

EUROPE and the East had cultivated the Smyrna fig even before the time of recorded history. In America the fruit had never been cultivated, and was only obtained through the medium of importation. However, in the eighteen eighties a San Francisco newspaper, probably as a publicity stunt, imported 14,000 Smyrna fig cuttings and distributed these among their subscribers.

The California climate seemed to act as a tonic, and soon these grew into strong and sturdy fig trees. It was too good to be true; at last America was to enjoy the plump and luscious Smyrna fig, and while eating it, have the satisfaction that it had been grown on the good old American soil of California.

Something went wrong. The trees, after maturing for four years, should have been developing those bulky Smyrna figs. In order to produce a fig, since a fig is not a true fruit, a bud must form a flower, which will turn inside out and develop its pistils and petal inside a hollow fleshy bowl. The trees of the California Smyrna growers did develop buds, but that is as far as the process went. The fig trees seemed incapable of maturing its buds, with the sad result that the buds soon dried up and fell from the branches.

The California growers were at a loss to explain this phenomenon. Their soil had been good to the Smyrna tree. They had watched their small cuttings take four years to attain maturity—and now, when the reward for all their troubles was so near, the tree had failed to develop figs.

The growers appealed to the United States Department of Agriculture, and even the department experts were baffled. Why should a tree grow for four years and then stop in its development? If the California environment was bad, then the trees should not have grown the way they did.

The government may have been stumped but it was far from defeated, it would get to the secret of the Smyrna tree—if it had to spend more money on research than the fig market was worth. Our government felt sure that what Europe and Smyrna, could grow—America could also grow; and if they could solve this problem so could we.

So, the government sent an expert all the way to Smyrna, the country where the famous Smyrna fig grew in the most abundance. No sooner had the expert arrived in Smyrna, when he observed a peculiar fact. Growing all about the good Smyrna fig trees were countless wild and useless fig trees, who produced a small and worthless fruit known as the caprifig. The expert also noted that the natives collected these caprifigs and hung them about their Smyrna fig orchards. When asked why they did so, they explained that the caprifig acted as a "charm" and had the power to keep away the evil spirits from their good fig trees. This reason did not satisfy the scientific expert. He was now firmly convinced that a connection existed between the caprifig and the Smyrna fig, and was constantly examining the caprifigs for some sign of life within it.

Soon he was rewarded for his tedious searching. He noticed a small fly-like insect emerge from the caprifig and fly straight to the nearest immature Smyrna fig. He watched this small wasp burrow its way into the fruit-like flowers; the wasp worked so feverishly that the wings were ripped off its body, as it burrowed and burrowed. Once inside the immature fig (and we must remember the wasp actually lost his wings, and in so doing his life, to get inside) the wasp seemed to say: "Sorry I must have found the wrong place"—for he quickly crawled back through the aperture. Once outside, he fell back to the ground wingless and utterly exhausted. He was soon dead.

After similar observations and experimentations, the riddle was completely solved. What was then a puzzling mystery—was now replaced by a series of scientific facts.

It seems that the young wasps cannot live in Smyrna figs, hence they must have been led by a mad instinct to leave the wild caprifigs—where they can breed and develop—to grow their way into an immature Smyrna bud. Perhaps it was an odor the Smyrna tree gave off that attracted these young wasps. At any rate, the result of their visit was a cross-pollination between the caprifig and the immature Smyrna fig. The cross-pollination presented the stimulus for the maturing of the fig.

The problem was now that the expert had proven the indispensability of an infested caprifig, how could we use this knowledge to solve the California fig situation. The solution to the problem came after four years of idealizing.

Using North Africa as a base—mainly because it was the closest region to California where infested caprifigs were available—a government agent wrapped each of the precious caprifigs in tinfoil and started it on the fastest possible route to California. It was a race against time—since the little wasps passed through their life cycle in two weeks, and in those days air transportation was in its utmost infancy and even sea transportation was in a "puny" condition when compared to our modern progress.

The race was a close one, indeed. The caprifigs arrived not even a day too soon. Almost immediately the wasps emerged and made straight for the tall immature California Smyrna trees. The battle had been won. The wasps reproduced and soon there were millions infesting the transplanted caprifig trees.

Now when a California fig grower eats his juiciest Smyrna fig, he smiles and blesses first the caprifig and then the heroic little wasp that gives its life so that a Smyrna fig may be born.

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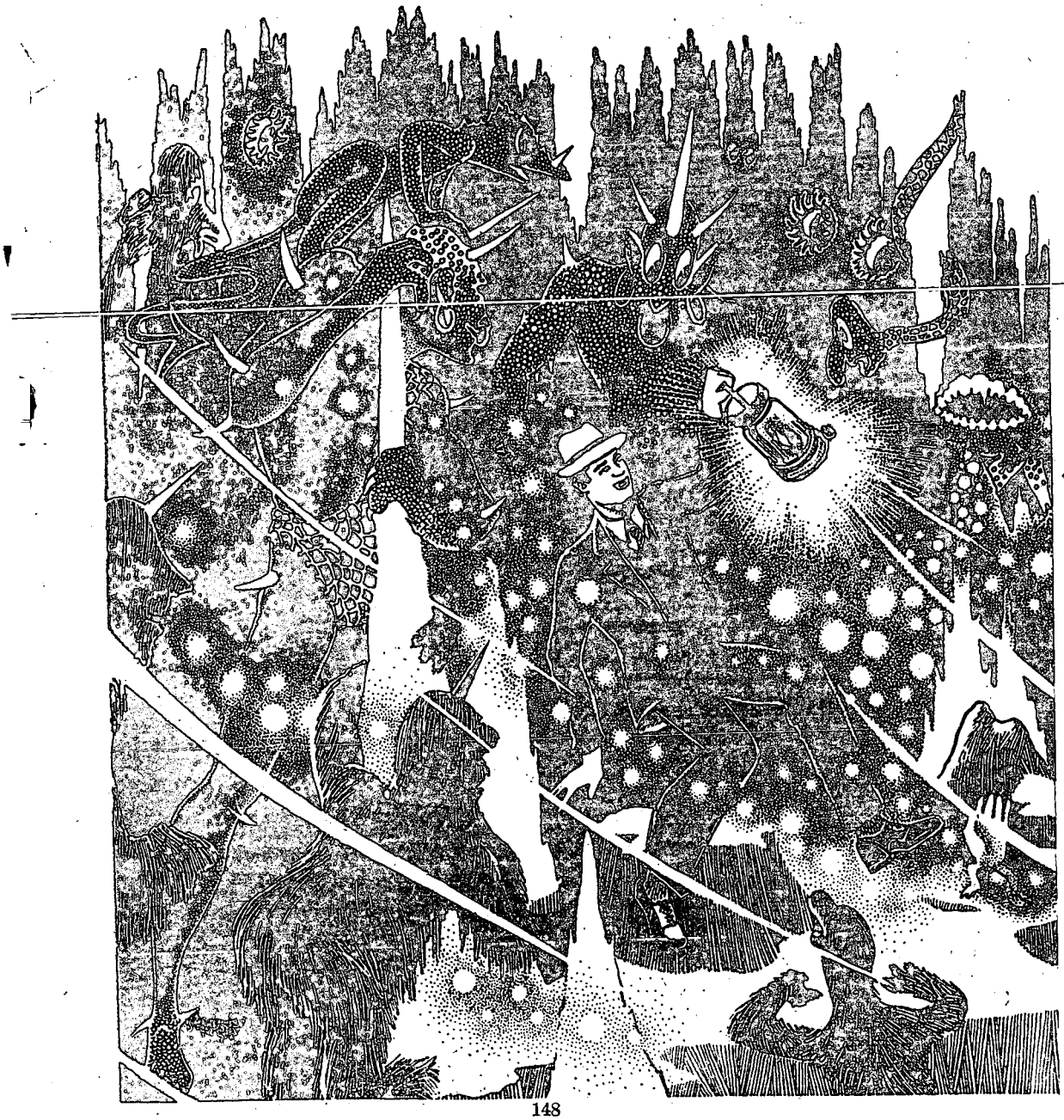
Lefty Feep found Aladdin's lamp, but it didn't do him much good because a gang of underworld criminals took it from him. As it turned out, it didn't do them much good either—they lit it during a blackout!



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GENIE WITH THE LIGHT BROWN HAIR

by ROBERT BLOCH

I WAS sitting in Jack's Shack the other day, eating ham and eggs for breakfast. It was early—I could see that, because there weren't many stains on the table-cloth. Outside of the people present, the place was deserted. That is to say, the usual restaurant flies weren't awake yet.

Certainly the last person I expected to see was Lefty Feep. But sure enough, the tall thin teller of tales came walking towards my table. As usual, he was wearing a loud checkered suit that matched his checkered career.

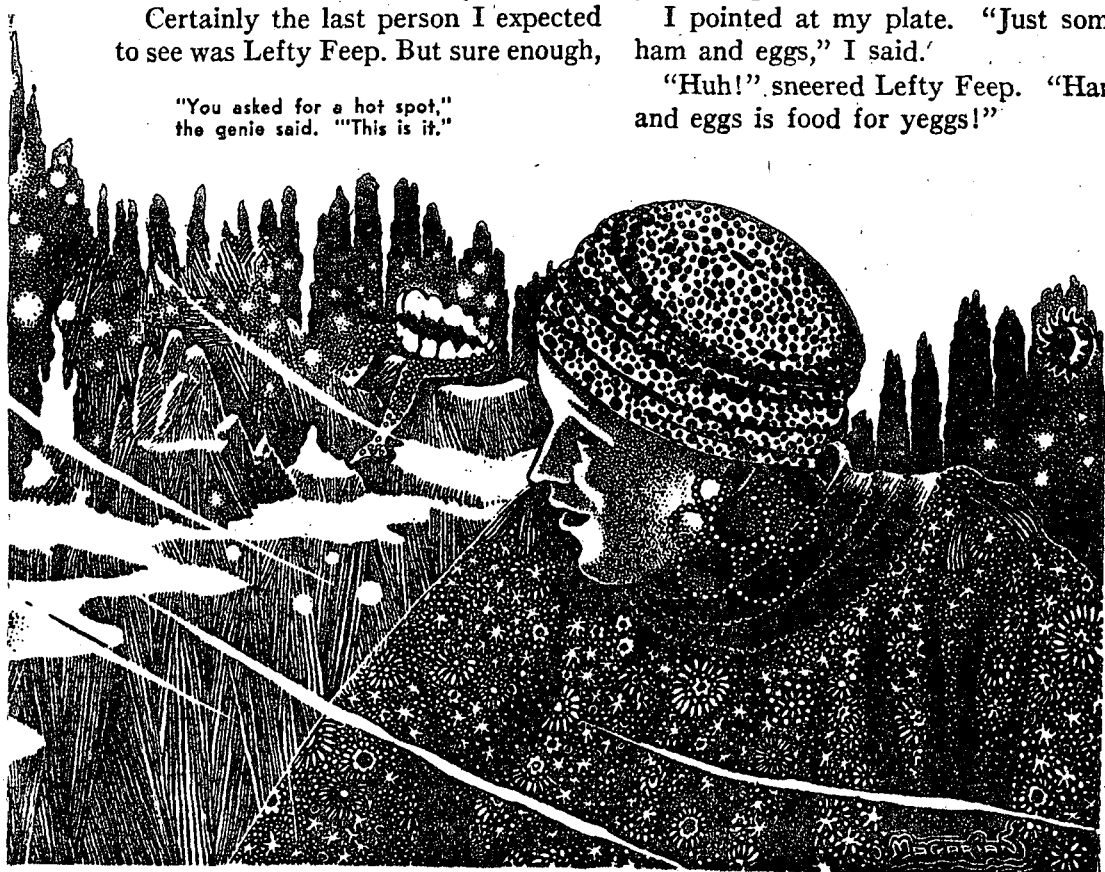
When Feep saw me, he quickened his pace.

"Accept my greeting and what are you eating?" he hailed me.

I pointed at my plate. "Just some ham and eggs," I said.

"Huh!" sneered Lefty Feep. "Ham and eggs is food for yeggs!"

"You asked for a hot spot," the genie said. "This is it."



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"What's the matter, don't you care for the dish?"

"Very vulgar." Feep shrugged. "Me, I am used to smell and see a delicacy. I like a plate of pate de phooey grass. Or a jar of caviar. Also, I am very fond of tearing a terrapin."

"Why, Lefty," I exclaimed, "where do you get such food?"

Feep sighed as he sat down next to me.

"I don't any more," he admitted. "My luck changes. Now, to tell the truth I would just as soon lam into some of that ham, or beg for an egg."

He scowled. I patted his shoulder.

"Well, just make light of it," I consoled him.

This remark didn't console. Feep bridled.

"Don't talk about making light," he muttered.

"You needn't flare up this way," I told him.

Feep positively trembled. "Please do not give me the squirms with such terms!" he begged.

"What's the matter—you been playing with fire?" I asked.

"You know how it is," he sighed. "A burnt child fears the hotfoot." He shook his head. "But I do not like this light talk. What happens to me shouldn't happen to a Jap!"

"Must be pretty awful, Lefty," I answered.

"It is awful. So awful I will tell it to you."

I was afraid of that. I got to my feet. "Sorry," I stammered. "I must go now. I've got a hot date."

"Let her wait for you and cool off," Feep snapped. "This story is really terrible. In fact it is so atrocious you must hear it."

"That's a swell recommendation," I drawled. "I'm willing to take your word for it, and go."

"You will take all my words for it!" said Lefty Feep. He shoved me into my chair and swiftly tied my arms down with the table-cloth.

"Now!" he said.

Then Lefty Feep sat down and unfolded his tale.

I AM sitting in my room the other day suffering from a terrible injury. It seems the night before I am handling a pair of dice when they suddenly go off. I do not even know they are loaded.

Anyhow, there is quite an explosion, and I wind up with the shirt torn off my back—also most of my skin, because the other players beat me up.

So there I am sitting in my room, partly fractured and completely broke. I squat there while the collectors play drum solos on my door. The rent collector, the gas collector, the light collector, the insurance collector, the tax collector. I am afraid if the garbage collector shows up he will take me away, because I am certainly ready for the scrap-heap.

All at once I hear a new banging on the panels.

I rush to my feet and go into the closet to look for my steel traps. Because I know who is at my door now—the Wolf.

And I am not exactly in my Little Red Riding Hood mood today. But the banging keeps up, and there is nothing for me to do but open the door before it comes off the hinges.

So I slide it back a crack and take a weak peek. Then I breathe a sigh of relief and asthma.

It is not the Wolf. It is not even a coyote. Just a little shrivelled-up and drivelled-down personality in a suit that resembles a walking rag bag. He looks like something the cat drags in, and I do mean a mouse.

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"Ah—excuse me," he whispers.

"Sure, buddy," I tell him. "You're excused. First door to your left. Goodbye."

"No, no," he insists. "I mean, are you Mr. Feep?"

"You got a warrant?"

"No."

"Then I'm Feep. And who are you?"

"Jerkfinkle is my name. Otis Jerkfinkle."

I stare at him. "Don't I perceive you someplace before?" I ask, trying to remember what freak-shows I attend in my life.

"I believe so."

"In the morgue, maybe?" I guess.

"Not at all." Otis Jerkfinkle smiles. "If I am not mistaken, you are the gentleman who secures the idol of the God Squat for my private museum."

Sure enough, I remember now. This Otis Jerkfinkle is the curator of a museum of stuff ornamental and oriental. Once before I tangle with him when I help him get the statue of a Burmese god away from a crook.

"Could be," I admit. "Well, what's on your mind besides a tumor?"

Otis Jerkfinkle comes into my room and sits down.

"I am on a spot," he sighs. "And I want you to help me."

I laugh in a sarcastic key. "I am on the spot too," I tell him. "And nobody can help me—not even a dry-cleaner."

"But this is very simple," Jerkfinkle pipes. He fumbles around in a briefcase and brings out something wrapped up in a newspaper. I stare at the paper with disappointment. No comic strips.

"Mr. Feep," says Jerkfinkle, "I am closing up the museum for the duration of the war and storing away my valuable art treasures. But there is one item I cannot afford to store, because no insurance will cover it. It is a very special item in its way. And I am wondering if you might take care of it for me while I'm away."

"What is it?" I inquire.

Jerkfinkle hands me the bundle wrapped in newspapers.

"Open it up and see for yourself," he says.

I UNWRAP the newspapers, wondering what is underneath. Gold, jewels, platinum? Diamonds? Rubies? Rubber?

But it is none of these precious things that I pull out from the wrappings.

All I find is a lamp.

A dirty, greasy old kerosene lamp.

I give it a leer and a sneer.

Jerkfinkle watches me with gleaming eyes.

"There it is," he whispers. "Isn't it a beauty?"

"Where do you win this?" I mutter. "In the future keep away from Bingo games where they give such lousy prizes."

"This is not a prize," insists Jerkfinkle.

"You're telling me?"

"This is nothing other than Aladdin's Lamp!" he chatters.

"Aladdin's Lamp, eh?"

"Actually."

"Then why doesn't this guy Aladdin take care of it?" I ask him. "Better still, why doesn't he throw it away and buy a flashlight?"

Jerkfinkle gives me a glare and stare.

"Can it be," he asks, "that you do not know the story of Aladdin and his wonderful Lamp?"

"Can be," I admit.

So Jerkfinkle goes off into a long song and dance about this overgrown cigarette-lighter he has. Translating same into English, the gag runs like this.

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ONCE upon a time there is a Chink gink by the name of Aladdin who is strictly from hunger. By hook and crook he gets hold of a magic lamp which has nothing in common with the stuff put out by the Electric Company.

Whenever he slides his pinkies around the base of this lamp and goes rub-adub-dub, a Genie appears. A Genie, according to the story, is just a big, overgrown stooge. A demon servant, strictly non-union. This Genie serves Aladdin and brings him anything he wishes. Just like a one-man Finance Company. Aladdin has a lot of adventures with his lamp and ends up rich, famous, and with ulcers.

That is the bark of Jerkfinkle's remarks.

"But where do you get this lamp?" I ask.

Jerkfinkle says he buys it from a curio dealer in a Hong Kong hock-shop some years ago.

I look at the article with new interest.

"Well," I say. "In such a case, why don't you use this magic lantern? Why don't you scrape your fingers to the bone, rubbing it? You will be rich and famous."

Jerkfinkle sighs. "That's the rub," he tells me. "The lamp doesn't work any more."

"Doesn't work?"

"Look." He shows me the sides of the lamp. "The metal is so worn down through rubbing that you can't leave fingerprints, or whatever is necessary for the Genie to appear."

"In other words, this is just a hunk of junk."

"Thaumaturgically speaking, yes."

"Cut out that kind of talk around here," I warn him.

"Don't misunderstand me," Jerkfinkle peeps. "This lamp is very valuable as an antique alone. I prize it most highly, despite its lack of supernatural power."

"Or candle-power," I add, looking at the battered wreck.

"But what I want to know is, will you take care of it for me while I am away?"

"Just where are you going?" I inquire.

Jerkfinkle smiles.

"I am enlisting in the Navy!"

I size him up, then down, then sideways. "What can you do in the Navy?" I ask. "To begin with you are a runt. Besides, all you are fit for is collecting old junk."

"There will be lots of old junk when we finish up with the Jap cities," Jerkfinkle tells me.

I smile. "A very brilliant notion," I agree. "I am proud of you. And I will be most happy to take care of this bric and brac for you while you are away."

"A thousand thanks," says Jerkfinkle, bowing and rubbing his paws together. "I know it will be in good hands."

And he ducks out the door, leaving me to lamp at the lamp.

I sit there and stare at it. Then I get an idea. Of course I know this Aladdin story is just so much hop-slop, but it isn't going to hurt just to manicure my fingernails against it.

So I give it a rub. Nothing happens.

I give it a complete massage. Still nothing happens.

It is just too bad. I sit there, wishing I could get hold of a Genie, or whatever. I am broke and hungry and what I want is bright lights and gayety.

But bright lights I don't get. Instead I get darkness. It is toppling towards nightfall.

I GET up and go over to the light switch and press it. Then the Electric Company hands me a shock. They turn off the electricity.

Maybe that is what I get for throw-

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ing the bill collector down the stairs without the courtesy of opening the door.

So there I am in the dark. Not only am I alone and hungry but I can't even see myself starve.

I can't rub the lamp any more, because I don't get a look at it. So what good is the damned thing?

What I do get is a sudden idea.

"Why not put some kerosene in the lamp?" I figure.

It just so happens that I do have a can of kerosene left in the closet for cleaning my clothes. I go over and sniff around, find the can, and pour its contents into the lamp. I feel the lamp and locate a wick. I get a match.

The lamp flares up.

Things look a little better. At least I am going to have enough light to cut my throat, if I go to that point.

But after a couple of minutes I am not so pleased any more. The old lamp begins to smoke a little.

Then it smokes a lot.

I cough and wheeze and then rush to the window to open it for air.

I never get any air, but in another minute I really need it.

Because all at once I stare at the cloud of smoke and see something standing in it. Rising out of the lamp is a figure.

"The Genie!" I yell.

And it is—the Genie.

Standing there in the smoke is a large personality. He isn't quite as big as a house, and not quite as heavy as an elephant. He seems to be about 15 feet tall in his unwashed feet, and his arms will rate him the best portions at any boarding-house table. He has a dark complexion and a face that only a mother could love. A mother gorilla, that is.

Hanging down from his face is a beard that would make a swell stuffing for a hair mattress. The guy is definitely burly but surly.

He just stands there and I just shiver there. He looks at me, but I can't look at him. My very eyeballs are bouncing with fright.

Suddenly the Genie opens his mouth. I get real pangs when I see his fangs. I figure he is going to make a grab for me and a jar of mustard and maybe have a little snack.

But he does not bite. He talks.

At least I think it is talking—though it sounds more like a combination of thunder and LaGuardia.

"What is your wish, oh Master of the Lamp?" he growls.

Master of the Lamp? He means *me!*

Then I get it. The yarn about Aladdin is true. But now, with the sides of the lamp worn out, the power of bringing a Genie must lie in *lighting* the lamp, instead.

So I light it, so I get this supernatural stooge—this Genie with the light brown hair. In other words, I am the master of this walking disaster.

"What do you desire?" he repeats.

I don't hesitate a second.

"Bring me some incense," I gasp.

Because the lamp smoke is filling the room. Also the Genie is apparently just returning from a garlic spree.

"I hear and I obey," says the Genie.

ALL at once I blink my eyes. He disappears into thin air. All at twice I blink again. The Genie is back, lighting a big bowl filled with roses for the noses.

"That's better," I tell him. "Now for some clothes."

"New garments?" he asks, bowing—or as the orientals call it, salami-ing.

"New and blue and not too few," I instruct him.

"I hear and I obey," he rumbles. And does a quick fade-out. In a min-

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ute he is back again with an armful.

"Try this for size," he says.

And he hands me a long striped robe.

"What is this?" I inquire. "A night-gown?"

"It's our new Spring model, just coming in," the Genie assures me. "Fresh from Damascus."

"I can't wear this kimono," I tell him. "What about trousers?"

He grabs a hunk of moth meat and throws it at me. It is a pair of oversize bloomers with about ten yards of material in each leg.

"Where's the pleats?" I yell. "What kind of a pair of pants is this?"

"It's all the thing this season," prattles the Genie. "It is said in Bagdad that—"

"Nuts to Bagdad and the Bagdaddies," I snap. "I want clothes. Trousers, shirts, coats, hats—"

"Headgear?"

The Genie tosses me a red bedsheet. "Here is a splendid turban," he recommends.

"Turban? I don't want a turban, I want a hat!" I yell. But I begin to understand. This Genie is plenty old-fashioned, and is bringing me the same line of merchandise he hands out to Aladdan hundreds of years ago, or whenever.

"Listen, my phantasmal pal," I explain. "I want something in reason for this season. Maybe a blue coat with orange trousers, so I can wear my green shirt with it, and my purple tie. You know, conservative."

"I shall do my best," growls the Genie, bowing low. Then he scoops up the Arabian night-gowns and disappears again.

Another flash and he is gone. When he returns I see he brings just what I ask for.

"Try this coat," he urges. "Three buttons. New cuffless trousers, too."

I slip into the outfit. It looks fine.

"No charge for alterations," he tells me.

I wonder where he picks up all this sales lingo and ask him.

"My late Master, Aladdin, is a tailor," he explains.

"Well, now you're catching on," I compliment him. "Genie, you're a genius!"

I want him to feel good, because already I am constructing big plans for my genial Genie. After all, he is supposed to be able to do anything. And I am all set to play Morgenthau and tax his ingenuity. Or whatever.

I run over a few future orders in my mind. A palace, a yacht, a private swimming pool and burlesque show, a—

A horrible disaster!

I turn around, and the Genie is gone. The lamp is out, too, and I am back in darkness.

And here I figure this is the beginning of such a beautiful friendship!

THEN I realize things are not really so bad after all. I merely run out of kerosene, and when the lamp goes out the Genie goes with it.

All I have to do is go out and get some more kerosene. Then the Genie will come back and do his stuff.

So I put on my green shirt and purple tie, grab the lamp up under my arm, and prance down the stairs.

"I will fill up the lamp at the corner," I figure.

But when I get to the corner the grocery is closed. I happen to notice a tavern, though, and I figure again. "Why not fill myself up a little, too?"

Besides, maybe they have kerosene there.

So I waltz in and up to the bar.

"Got any kerosene, buddy?" I ask.

The bartender gives me an unfumigated look.

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"What kind of stuff do you think I serve here?" he mutters.

"I want kerosene," I insist.

"You'll take our whiskey and like it," he says. Then he winks. "Just like kerosene," he whispers. "You won't notice the difference."

"But it isn't for drinking," I explain. "I want it for my lamp here."

"I will send out and get you some," the bartender tells me. "Take your drink first."

This I cannot do, because I have no money to pay. I must get the lamp going so the Genie will give me some dough.

"Kerosene first," I tell the bartender. "You see, it's this way. I make a little promise to myself tonight. I will get my lamp lit before I am."

The bartender laughs and sends a boy out for kerosene. When he comes back I take the kerosene and the lamp into the men's lounge.

"I'll light it up back here," I explain. "It smokes pretty bad at first."

And it does. But somehow, I am very happy in about five minutes when the Genie emerges from the smoke and stands there with his hands folded across his chest. The big ugly monster actually looks very sweet to me when I think of what he can do. If I have a stepladder handy, I almost feel like running up it and kissing him.

Instead I give him a blink and a wink.

"What is your wish, oh Master?" he cracks.

"Genie," I instruct him, "make with the millions. Get us some lettuce. Slip me some chips."

"I don't understand, Master."

"I want mazuma!" I yell. "Wallpaper from the bank."

"I still do not understand."

"Dough," I explain, very patiently. "Kale. Cash!"

"So?" says the Genie. "Dough?"

"Go!" I command.

The Genie bows. Then he disappears. "I'll be back in a flash with the cash," he mumbles.

I wait until the Geni returns, which he does quite suddenly. He makes a very nice jingling sound when he appears.

"Give," I gasp.

He begins to pull purses from his pockets.

I pull curses from my lips.

A SHOWER of coins falls all over me, but it is not the kind of shower I can bathe in. Because the coins are very peculiar—some of them are square and some are crescent-shaped, and all of them are old and green. As a matter of fact, the big ones are nothing but brass with a lot of dizzy writing on them.

"What kind of telephone slugs do you hand me?" I complain.

"Dinars," says the Genie. "Very valuable."

"Dinars, suppers, breakfasts—nuts to them all, impartially," I comment. "I want American money."

Once again this Arabian nightmare has the wrong idea and brings me old-fashioned merchandise.

He shrugs, gathers up the coins, and disappears again. When he returns he flings me a flock of nickels, dimes, quarters, halves, and silver dollars. To be exact, $423.15 in change.

This I pocket.

"What now, Master?" asks the Genie.

"That's all for the moment. If I want anything I'll light the lamp for a signal," I tell him. "One if by land and two if by sea."

Then I extinguish the kerosene lamp and go back to the bar.

The bartender is waiting and I flash

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him a big smile.

"Thanks for the kerosene," I tell him.

"What about your drink?" he asks. "It's still waiting for you."

For answer I turn the glass upside down.

"Do not produce such juice," I tell him. "From now on I am drinking champagne."

"A bottle?" he says, with his eyes popping out like corks.

"A lot of bottles," I tell him. "Serve it in a bucket. And have a bucket yourself."

So we kick the bucket a few times and the bucket has quite a kick. I spill a few bills and then get restless. So I rush into the back again. I get bright with the light and wait for the Genie to show up.

"Master?" he greets me.

"I am beginning to feel hungry," I tell him. "I have an appetite for a bite. What do you suggest?"

"Dates," he says. "Figs, perhaps? Goat's cheese and rice?"

"Nuts!" I comment.

"What kind?"

"No kind," I tell him. "You are too old-fashioned, Genie. I want other food. Bring me some terrapin, a jar of caviar, a little breast of pheasant, some venison, lobster ala Newburg, oysters Rockefeller, and—a bottle of bicarbonate."

Back comes the Genie with the grub. I sit there and gobble for a while.

"Something missing," I comment.

The Genie looks surprised. "These rations are fit for Haroun Al Raschid," he insists.

"I know what it is," I tell him. "Pass the salt."

So he disappears and returns with salt. I finish my meal and am well satisfied.

"Now how about something to smoke?" I suggest.

"To hear is to obey." Off goes the Genie in a cloud. He comes back with a big glass pot with a snake hanging out of it.

"What in or out of this world is that?" I gasp.

"Something to smoke. A nargileh. Water-pipe."

"Take it back to the plumber and bring me a nice Garcia y Garcia panatella," I command.

IN a minute I am sitting back smoking quite comfortably. Now I am ready for action. I have a good meal, champagne, a little loose change, and plenty of loose ideas.

For the first time I realize I am not making proper use of my great powers. Here I have anything in the world at my disposal and all I get is a few clothes and something to fill my stomach. I am very foolish. I should be wishing for something valuable.

Something valuable. . . .

I put the grind on my mind.

"Genie," I say, "I know what the trouble is. I cannot concentrate here. It is much too quiet for me to hear myself think. Take me to a night club. I do not say a *good* night club, because such a thing is even beyond your powers. Just a spot where things are hot."

Suddenly I am caught up in a swirling fog—a most unpleasant fog—the kind of fog that will never be missed.

I whirl around and all at once I land. I am sitting down.

"Here we are, Master!" booms the Genie at my side.

"Ouch!" I remark.

I jump about three feet in the air, which gives me a swell view of the place I am located in—although no view of such a place is exactly swell.

I am in some kind of cavern, apparently located next door to the cen-

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tral heating plant of Hell.

Squatting on rocks and boulders all around me are the most ungodly assortment of personalities I ever see—and I am a guy who attends plenty of Bingo games in his time.

Some of these personalities are all black and covered with long fur. Others give the impression of being just huge sets of teeth, with legs attached. There are many who resemble my Genie. The shortest individual in the cavern is at least nine feet high.

All this I take in as I jump up. Then I land back on the rock again.

"Ouch!" I yell, repeating myself. But the rock is repeating its heating.

"What kind of a hot seat are you giving me?" I scream at the Genie. "Where am I and why am I?"

"You ask for a hot spot," mumbles my huge stooge. "This is it! There is much heat here."

"You're telling me? But exactly where am I?"

"In Eblis," explains the oversize Oriental. "The meeting place of all Genii, *djinn, efreets,* and demons."

I am sizzling with anger, and also with something else—so I get off the rock in a hurry. I wave the lamp at the Genie.

"Get me out of this ghoul gallery," I command. "I ask for a night club, not a fright club."

So I explain what a night club is in words of strictly one syllable or less, and finally the Genie catches on. By this time I catch on to the Genie and climb up his waist, because several of these black babies with the teeth are eyeing me the way a robin looks at a worm—affectionately, but with too much interest.

"Back to Earth," I command. "Remember, make it a night club this time—you'll recognize it by the smell of gin when you fly over same."

THERE is another stretch of fog as the Genie waves his arms. I toss around in a cloud, and when I open my eyes I toss around in a crowd.

Sure enough, I am sitting at the table of Mabel's Stable, a paddock for society fillies and clothes-horses.

The second my eyes pop open I blow out the lamp in my hand and the Genie blows out with it.

It is very fortunate that everybody watches the floor show when I make my unexpected appearance at a rear table, because there is no one to see the Genie before he disappears.

Even so, I notice a couple of greaseballs up at the bar are giving me a hint of a squint.

I turn around and look nonchalant. Here I am in a night spot. The band is kicking the gong on a popular song, a girl singer is making a groan at the microphone, a crowd is prancing, dancing, and romancing—it is just noisy enough for me to concentrate.

And concentrate I do.

Not on the lamp, though.

On the blonde who is sitting at the next table.

Now I don't know how it is with you. With me, it's blondes. And this particular damsel is high, wide, and peroxide.

She is sitting there alone, and so naturally I do my best to attract her attention in a polite manner with such remarks as "Hey, there, babe!" and "Say, kitten!" and just a little courteous whistling.

But she is very aloof and refined and takes no notice of me at all except to stick out her tongue and remark in a society tone of voice, "Go drop dead, you dizzy-looking jerk!"

So I can see she is really quite infatuated with me, but is playing hard to get.

And so it happens that tonight I am

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in a position to get. So I duck under the table, pull the tablecloth over my head, and light the lamp. It is awful under there with all the smoke, but I do not wish anyone to notice me. Of course the lights are all out during the floor show here so I am not very conspicuous, except the part of me sticking out from under the table behind.

Even so, I nearly choke to death before the five minutes are up and the Genie appears. He swells out of the smoke but before he can grow to his fifteen feet I whisper, "I command you to stop growing," and he does.

"What is your wish, oh Master?" he mutters.

"My wish is that dish," I explain, pointing at the damsel. "Bring her to my table."

"Your wish is my command," says the Genie.

"After you bring her, disappear," I caution him.

He bows and the smoke flickers out.

IN ANOTHER minute I am back in my seat, and sitting across from me is this blonde tomato, blinking her eyes.

"How do I get here?" she gasps. "I am sitting at my table and then all at once I am over here."

"Well do not bother to go away," I said, very polite. "A beautiful tomato like you should stay planted."

She softens up a little at this flattery.

"After all," I pursue, "you are lucky. Not every girl can sit with the richest man in the world."

"Why—" she flutters. "Mr. Morgenthau, I am sorry I do not recognize you before."

"My name is Lefty Feep," I say. "And this Morgenthau of whom you shriek is just a piker compared to me."

"I do not see how anybody would be a piker—compared to you," ribs the blonde. "You are not dressed like a wealthy man. And why do you carry around this greasy old lamp?"

"It is for giving hot-foots to anybody who asks foolish questions," I reply. "But I will prove to you that I am rich."

"Go peddle your fish," she remarks, in a cultured way.

I stand up.

"Just give me five minutes," I promise her. "Five minutes is all I need. At the end of that time I will show you wealth beyond your wildest dreams."

She shrugs. But I bow, pick up the lamp, and walk away.

As I go out, I notice the two jerks at the bar still gandering at me. One nudges the other and points at Aladdin's lamp.

I give them no notice, however. I have other things on my mind.

This really my chance to prove what the Genie can do. So I proceed very carefully. I walk past the cloak room of the night club until I come to the manager's office, which is empty. I slip in and close the door.

Then I kneel down and light the lamp. "Genie," I whisper, "do your stuff!"

Five minutes later I walk back to the table. The blonde is still sitting there. When I tap her on the shoulder she smirks.

"Come with me," I tell her. "I'll show you some real wealth."

"I don't want to look at any etchings, now," she sniffs. "Or anything tattooed, either."

"This is strictly on the level," I insist. "Right this way."

I lead her to the door of the manager's office. Then I stop and look mysterious.

"Behind that door," I tell her, "is the most precious collection in the world. Imagine the most priceless treasures—let yourself go—see if you can guess."

She is really interested now.

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"Gold?" she squeaks.

I shake my head.

"Diamonds?"

I shake again.

"Well—radium? Platinum?"

"You'll have to see it to believe it," I say. And push her through the doorway. She gets a look and just stands there.

"I can't believe it!" she screams.

I hold her so she won't fall in a faint.

"Rubber tires!" she whispers. "Piles of rubber tires, new ones! And look—a refrigerator! And all that gas! Typewriters, too. Thousands of tires and things!"

"All mine," I smirk. "Now do you believe I'm rich?"

SHE is just in a daze. I am very proud. I have the Genie fill the manager's office with all this stuff and it is just a sample of what he can do when he really gets started. Now I think I know the kind of career I will have.

But then I notice the blonde tomato is staring at me very funny.

"What's the matter, toots?" I ask. "Won't you go out with me now?"

She steps away with a little shudder.

"I know what you must be!" she screams. "A smuggler! Of course you are—with all this illegal stuff here! You're a smuggler, a crook. Help!"

The last remark is not addressed to me, but to the entire night club down the hall.

I slam the door and lock myself in. This is a fine mess. I suddenly realize that I make a real mistake when I have the Genie bring me a lot of illegal merchandise. So I light the lamp in a flurry of hurry. They are thumping on the door outside by the time I bring the Genie into the room from the lamp-smoke.

"Get rid of all this," I command.

He swirls around, scooping up all the lovely things, and disappears. I put out the lamp, swirl around to the window, and disappear myself, before they get the door open. I drop to the ground below.

I step outside and snare a little air. While I am standing there a big limousine pulls up to the curb. It is a gorgeous gaswagon, with actual tires on it.

The limousine parks and the door swings open.

I blink at that, because I do not order a car from the Genie.

Then it is all explained. A couple of personalities protrude their noggins and give me the old wail and hail.

With a shock I recognize the brace from the bar. I place them at last. They are gamblers.

"Hello, Lefty!" they yell, giving me the sweet greet.

"Well if it isn't Merton and Albert," I reply.

And so it is. Mercenary Merton and Avaricious Albert are their names. Mercenary Merton and Avaricious Albert are so called because they are very affectionate when it comes to money, and are known to sit up all night nursing a nickel.

Ordinarily I do not have anything to do with these customers because of their needy and greedy manners.

But now I am slightly intrigued because they yell at me, and also because of their limousine.

"Going our way, Lefty?" they inquire.

I shake my head, because I am not bound for hell just yet.

"We want to talk to you," says Merton.

"Yeah," Albert chimes in. "A business proposition."

"Do I look like a gorilla?" I ask. "Because any business that you have must be money business."

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Mercenary Merton and Avaricious Albert laugh very heartily at this and give me a jolly smile.

"Good old Feep," wheezes Merton. "Always a card."

"Speaking of cards," I reply, "what's up your sleeve?"

"A great idea," he insist. "Come along to our penthouse and we will discuss it."

"There's millions in it," Avaricious Albert chimes in. "Positively millions. Feep, how would you like a million dollars?"

"In dimes and quarters if you please," I reply. "I like to play slot machines."

"You can own slot machines with the money we'll make," Albert assures me. "Come on—hop in and we'll go up to the penthouse."

SO I GRAB my lamp very tightly and step into the big car. We glide along, and I notice both Albert and Merton eye the lamp under my arm quite closely.

"What you got there?" Albert asks.

"An antique," I tell him.

"Just what I need for over the mantel," he says. "Feep, it happens I am crazy for antiques. You never know that, do you?"

"Of course I do," I reply. "I see some of the dames you run around with."

This is the signal for more guffaws. You would think I was a radio comic with a hot Crosley the way they go for my remarks.

"Seriously," Albert goes on, "I would like to own that lamp of yours. How about making a deal?"

"No sale," I mutter.

Merton pokes Albert and he shuts up.

Then the car pokes the curb and pulls up.

"Here we are," says Merton. "Right this way."

We go through a swell lobby into a big apartment hotel. Merton and Albert lead me to the elevator and we go up to the twenty-ninth floor.

Albert unlocks the door and I step into a genuine penthouse—with two pairs of pents.

"Park it here," says Merton, indicating a sofa lush but plush.

I dip my hips. Merton and Albert sit opposite me, staring and glaring. Merton keeps his eyes on me and Albert lamps at the lamp I carry. I address my remarks to him.

"Well, heel, what's the deal?" I inquire.

Albert clears his throat with a noise that makes his Adam's apple wobble.

"Feep," he begins, "we would like to go into partnership with you. How would you like to stay here with us—live in this beautiful penthouse, drive our big limousine, and live off the fat of the land?" He smiles. "To say nothing of the fatheads?"

"Yes," chimes in Merton. "We like you, Feep. We want to see you get ahead in the world. We figure we'd make a swell team."

"You guys wouldn't make a swell team for a junk wagon," I answer, in a cynical fashion. "Cut out the soft soap and let's get down to business. Just what do you two buzzards want?"

ALBERT stops smiling.

"Feep," he growls, "You've got a lamp there. A very unusual lamp. We could use that lamp to mutual advantage."

"What are you talking about?"

"You know what I'm talking about!" shouts Albert. "Don't bother to stall around. We know you have Aladdin's lamp!"

"Not so loud," I whisper. "Some-

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body might hear."

"This penthouse is soundproof," Merton chuckles. "It's all right."

"But about this lamp," Albert breaks in. "We see you use it. Feep, you must be dull in the skull! Here you have such great opportunities and all you do is waste them—you don't seem to realize the tremendous possibilities in your lamp!"

"Such as?"

"Why we could take that lamp of yours and really keep the home fires burning! As partners, we can make plans and go a long way in his world."

"What's with this partners idea?" I complain. "I get along all right myself. And suppose you two birds get drafted?"

"Nuts to that," Merton says, very unpatriotic. "With such a lamp you must realize there is no need to worry about the war at all."

"Sure," says Albert. "That's just the idea, Feep. Think how valuable it is to command a Genie today. Think of what he can do—not just bring money and luxuries. That's petty stuff. Strictly small time. But with his powers he could find out military information. He could be a military weapon himself! You just aren't big enough to grasp it, Feep—that's why you need our brains. We know the angles, see? We could get this Genie to work discovering war plans and—"

"All right," I interrupt. "Maybe we can make a deal at that. I am very glad to help the war effort. We will take the lamp to Washington and let the government see what can be done."

Albert flashes me a sneer.

"Almonds, pecans, pistachios, and other kinds of nuts to the government!" he declares. "What will you get from the government except a lot of red tape wound around income taxes? Oh, no—there are other parties who will pay more for such a military weapon. I got contacts, see? And if we go to them and let them have first choice—"

NOW I catch the drift of their remarks. What these babies are really planning to do is to get high on treason. And it burns me up.

I jump off the sofa and grab the lamp.

"Listen," I mutter. "I've heard all the squeaking I want to from you rats. The deal is off. I'm getting out of here right now, and if I never see you again it will be plenty early enough for me."

"You aren't leaving us, are you?" says Albert, getting to his feet with a grin.

"You can't do that, you know," whispers Merton, also rising and circling around behind me.

I don't stop to argue. I jump for the door.

But before I get to it the lights go out. Somebody must get to the switches. Whatever it is, I am in the dark. I cannot find the door.

"Turn on the lights and let me out of here!" I yell.

But apparently this is not a request program. Because neither Albert or Merton turn on the lights. Instead they turn on the heat.

"Grab him!" yells a voice behind me. I run around the room, bumping into furniture and playing hide and go seek with these two hoods. I hold the lamp tight, and also try to hold my breath tight so they cannot hear me. But no matter where I run I feel one of them reaching out to tangle with me and strangle with me.

It is only a little while before Albert gets me by the neck and Merton ties into my stomach with his fists. I can only smack back with one hand so as not to drop the lamp. Even so I blow

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Albert's nose for him and dot Merton's eyes.

But in a few minutes I am lying on the floor with both of them on top of me.

"Get me the window-drapes," Merton grunts. "He's the kind you have to bind."

Albert gets strips of cloth from the windows.

I am fit to be tied.

I am.

And there we are in the dark. I am lying on the floor and Merton and Albert sit on the sofa with the lamp.

"The lights—" says Merton.

"Forget that!" snaps Albert. "What do we do?"

"We've got the lamp," Merton reminds him. "What else is there to do?"

"Yeah," I mutter, from the floor. "You guys win out. What more do you want?"

"Protection," Albert growls. "We have the lamp and we know what to do with it. But you also know that we have it. So we must get rid of you, but fast."

"Let's throw him out of the window," Merton suggests.

"No, too messy," Albert tells him. I am glad to hear that, because I agree.

"We could take him for a little ride," says Merton.

"Too much trouble getting him downstairs," says Albert. "We want to get rid of him in a way that will leave no traces. No traces at all."

"Say, what are you worrying about?" Merton chuckles. "Here we sit with a perfect solution and you wonder what to do."

"What do you mean?"

"Light the lamp," says Merton. "Light the lamp and call the Genie. Tell him to take Feep and get rid of him. Drag him off to Limbo, or Hades, or wherever. The Genie will do it."

"A very in-Genie-ous scheme," Albert agrees. "Too damned dark in here anyway."

I do not like the idea at all, but who am I to object? I can only lie there on the floor while Albert strikes a match and lights the lamp.

IT CASTS a bright glow over the room, but everything looks dark to me. I sit there and watch the lamp smoke up. In a few minutes the Genie will appear. They will issue the orders —and the Genie obeys whoever lights the lamp. I will go for a one-way trip to hell and gone. They will take the lamp and start their dirty work.

I wriggle and strain, but I cannot break the knots binding me. I am strapped and trapped.

Merton and Albert sit there and laugh at me.

"Well, Feep, it won't be long now," snickers Mercenary Merton. "Just remember, there'll always be a lamp in the window for our wandering boy."

"Thanks for bringing some light into our lives," laughs Avaricious Albert. "Too bad you won't be around to see the fun we're going to have. But I guess not—here comes Genie now."

Sure enough, the lamp is beginning to smoke. And I am beginning to burn. I watch the smoke swirl up. So do Albert and Merton.

The smoke goes up and my hopes go up with it.

And then—

None of us even hear the rattling at the door. Until too late. By then the rattling turns to a crash and the door of the penthouse apartment splinters in.

There is a guy standing there, with cops on either side.

"Those are the men!" he yells. "Get them!"

The boys in blue notice me tied up on the floor and then they ignore me

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completely as they rush Merton and Albert.

Meanwhile the personality in plain clothes goes for the lamp.

There is quite a little struggle, during which I get stepped on several times, once in the face. But this does not prevent me from sinking my teeth in Albert's ankles when he tries to run.

The plain clothes character tackles Merton, who is clutching the lamp and heading for a rear door. As the smoke swirls up I can almost see the Genie coming out—but the plain clothes fink suddenly grabs the lamp and clunks Merton over the noggin with it.

Merton doesn't see Genie after all. Just birdies.

But I yell, "Look out!" It is too late. The lamp breaks over Merton's head and drops in two pieces on the floor. It goes out at the same time Merton does.

In another minute it is all over. Merton and Albert are tied. I am untied.

They take Merton and Albert away, and I carry what is left of Aladdin's lamp over to the incinerator.

It is the last time Aladdin's lamp ever burns.

But I am burning ever since.

LEFTY Feep sighed and concluded. "A most unusual story," I commented. "But things didn't turn out so badly, after all. It certainly would be terrible if those two crooks had a Genie to command."

"Right," said Feep.

"But you know—I can't see why they didn't get away with it," I mused. "There's something I don't seem to understand."

Lefty Feep gave me a disgusted frown.

"What's bum, chum?" he grated.

"Well, I don't see why those cops came up to the penthouse and broke down the door. Did you warn them in some way?"

Feep smiled. "No, I do not warn them. The lamp does."

"The lamp warned them? How?"

"By being lit." Feep's smile broadened. "These two crooks are unpatriotic and that is what fixes them. They do not keep up with the news or they would know better than to light the lamp and bring the cops. They figure this is one of the Arabian Nights and it isn't—it's a different kind of a night."

I stared Feep in the eye.

"Why did those cops come?" I persisted.

"Because of the lamp," Feep smiled. "You will get them too—if you ever try to light a lamp during a blackout!"

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The Garden of

By LEROY YERXA

The flower-head of the monster plant reached out toward Leona Textan

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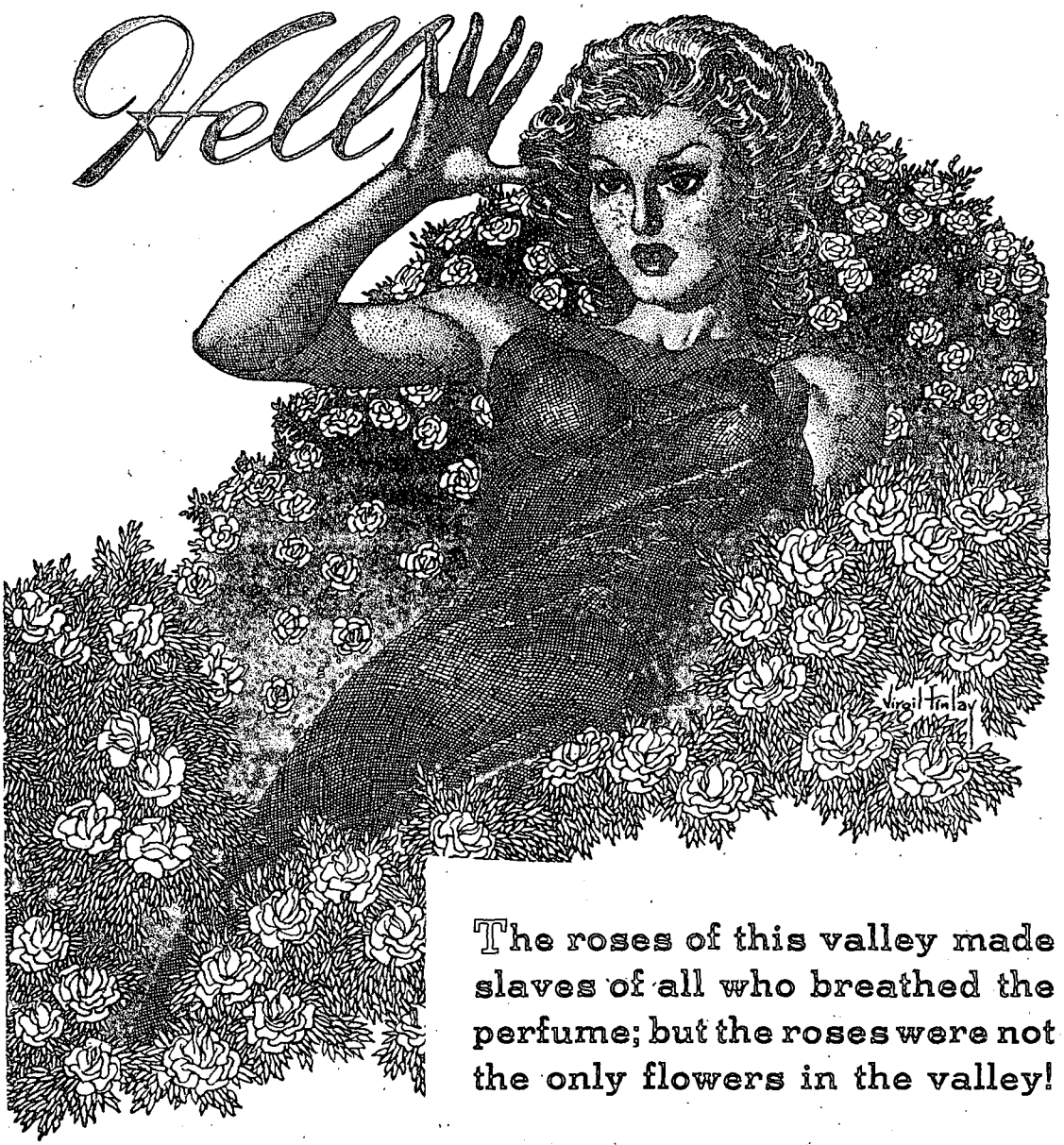
Jeff Flynn



The roses of this valley made slaves of all who breathed the perfume; but the roses were not the only flowers in the valley!

THE booth was by far the most attractive along the line. A Mexican girl stood behind the high-banked roses, her deep brown eyes raised to him questioningly. Jeff Flynn wasn't aware of her at once, so absorbed was he in the lush, blood-red flowers. Then, raising his eyes, he saw for the first time the shapely oval face, full lips, and the long flowing brown hair that framed her features so beautifully.

"I beg your pardon." Flynn's hat came off in a quick gesture of admiration. "I didn't see you. Your roses are superb."

A flush of color spread over her face and the long lashes dropped shyly.

"They are not mine," her voice was low and husky. "This booth belongs to Trujall."

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As though answering to the name, another head appeared over the top of the display. Involuntarily Jeff Flynn stepped back a pace. He had opened his lips to compliment the owner of the booth, but no words came. The eyes into which he stared were black as swamp pools. Trujall was an old man. His head was hatless and a thick, black stubble grew from it. The skin of his cheeks stretched tightly over high cheek bones. He was smiling, but the smile was a grimace that showed rotten, toothless gums.

"You like my pretty ones?" The words were sharp and high-pitched.

Flynn controlled himself quickly and a smile lighted his face.

"They're the finest I've ever seen," he confessed.

A claw-like hand swept up and plucked one of the largest blossoms.

"A gift to a rose lover," Trujall's smile was set and vacant. "It is not often an American stops here."

Flynn took the flower, noticing the long, dirt-blackened nails on the hand that offered it.

"Thanks," he said. "I'd like to see your gardens. Are they near here?"

Trujall's smile vanished. He stared straight at Flynn.

"No one visits Tipico," he growled. *"It is a far journey."*

Taken aback by the unfriendly tone in Trujall's voice, Flynn fumbled for words.

"I'll be around in a few hours to buy some of your roses," he said.

Was it his imagination, or did a fleeting look of fear suddenly darken the girl's face?

"We will be gone within an hour," Trujall answered. "My flowers fade quickly here."

Trujall's ox cart was drawn up close to the adobe wall behind the booth. It was covered with a coarse cloth, but under the cloth, a half-dozen bulging objects were visible. Flynn's eyes caught a movement there, and as he stared, two long octupus-like tendrils dropped over the side of the rough boards and wrapped tightly around the wheel. They were perhaps two feet long and covered with brown scale.

Flynn stared. What sort of plant was that? The bulge under the cloth moved. Trujall wheeled around, noting the direction of Flynn's gaze. He was across the booth swiftly, grasped the tendrils with both his skinny hands and yanked them from the wheel. They withdrew suddenly and the movement stopped.

Trujall turned, his face hateful.

"You will go at once," his words were a command.

Flynn caught the wide-eyed expression of horror on the girl's face, hesitated, slightly angered by Trujall's attitude, then turned on his heel and crossed the street.

That Mexican girl had been badly frightened. Jeff Flynn, strangely disturbed at the knowledge, made an effort to thrust it from his mind. After all, it was none of his business. But what was it that was in the ox cart that Trujall was so anxious to conceal? Some forbidden plant he was smuggling?

HERBERT ROSS was no fool. Fat and passing the age where romance held sway over logic, he could appreciate a woman of Gwenn's ability.

The plane was hovering over Oaxaco when Gwenn turned to talk to him for the first time during the trip down. Gwenn Hamlin, only a few hours divorced from Ross, was pretty in a heady sort of way. Her green eyes, tall slim body and luxurious red hair made men half insane. Herb Ross knew. Gwenn had given him no peace during the two years they lived together. Brainless

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and brittle was his description of her; the willing plaything of any man who had money.

"Herby," Gwenn said. "Why don't you go home?"

Ross smiled.

"Chicago has a meat packing plant for me to go home to," he answered. "Why should I forsake you for a line of frozen beef?"

She sniffed, but a badly repressed smile flitted over her face. She was secretly flattered that he still pursued her.

"You'll get the cold shoulder down here," Gwenn said warningly. "Besides, Herby, it isn't right."

"What isn't?" he asked shortly.

"Why—when a girl's divorced, she doesn't just go about with her ex-husband. What will Jeff think?"

Ross snorted.

"Jeff Flynn is a good boy," he said. "But Jeff's young and spoiled by money he hasn't any use for. Gwenn, you only like Jeff's money. You'll be tired of each other in a week."

Gwenn's face sobered. She intended to marry Jeff Flynn, and Ross would never keep her from it.

"Look," she said. "I've been square with you . . ."

He interrupted her with a short laugh.

"You've never been square for a minute," he said quickly. "That's the part you don't understand, Gwenn. I'd have been willing to give you your head if you'd have held to the bridle just enough to impress my friends and business associates."

Gwenn was angry. She turned her head away and hunched her shoulders down into the seat. They were coming down for the landing. Ross fastened his safety strap.

"You want me to act as a front for you," Gwenn said. "I was playing second fiddle to your business."

"In a manner of speaking," he answered, "that's not what I *want*. I love you, Gwenn, but you won't return my affection. I took the best bargain I could get."

The plane came down smoothly and rolled across the field.

"You've lost me, Ross," Gwenn said. "Jeff will be at the airport. After that, we'll get married and you can pack your bag for the next plane home."

Ross was silent. Waves of blood swept up around his thick neck and colored his cheeks. The plane stopped before the small hangar, and he stood up.

"Flynn is a good kid, but he's got some crazy ideas," he said. "You're not going to marry him, Gwenn. Be sure of that."

She was standing before him, her eyes blazing into his. She stamped her foot impatiently.

"And what can you do to prevent it?"

Ross bent his heavy face close to her.

"I'll kill you if I have to," he said in a hoarse whisper. "But I won't have to. You're going back to Chicago with me."

SPEECHLESS with rage, but frightened by this new Herb Ross, Gwenn followed him from the plane. A half-dozen passengers had gathered outside and a dilapidated station wagon stood by the road. The words *Oaxaco Hotel* were printed across its side.

She saw Jeff Flynn, tall and dust covered, a pipe in his mouth. She went toward him quickly, relieved that he was here to meet her.

Gwenn was less sure of herself than she had been when they last met. Herb might be right after all. Jeff was young and looking for adventure.

Her ex-husband filled her with foreboding over what his next move would

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be. She had never seen him pursue anything in this manner. He was frightening with his huge body and bullying voice, following her thousands of miles, never letting go the bull-dog grip he had on her past.

She went across the field quickly and into Flynn's arms. His kiss was on her cheek, rather cool she thought. Her ex-husband came up quickly, his hand held toward Flynn.

"Hello, Jeff," Ross' voice was friendly enough. "No doubt you wonder why I winged all the way down here under the circumstances. Well, I couldn't leave Gwenn in a wild country without friends. Acted as her personal bodyguard."

Flynn took the pudgy hand with mixed emotions.

"It *does* make an odd situation," he looked at Gwenn questioningly. "With your approval?"

Gwenn's face clouded.

"I tried to leave him in Reno," she said. "But I can't choose my flying companions. He's tried to make trouble all the way down."

Flynn clamped the pipe tightly between his teeth and picked up Gwenn's bags. Ross followed them across the dusty, cactus-grown field to the station wagon. He sat with the driver.

They were silent on the way to the hotel, and Flynn's hand drew away as Gwenn's fingers closed over it. He pretended to adjust the pipe, but she noticed that he carefully avoided her contact.

Gwenn was a lonely, shallow woman. The adventure of this new project was gone. There were two men for her, and she felt suddenly as though both of them had seen through her shield of glamor and were tearing her real self apart under steady scrutiny. She wished fervently that she had never seen Jeff Flynn, nor Reno. She wished for Chicago and the big mansion that Ross had kept for her. Gwenn felt tired and old and the mascara started to run on her lashes. The town was hot and airless and she had a dull, painful ache in her head.

Flynn arranged with the sleepy Mexican at the desk for a room for Gwenn opposite his own. Grinning, complacent Herbert Ross took the next room. The three of them climbed the worn stairs together and at his own door, Ross hesitated.

"Good luck, Jeff," he said, "you'll need it."

Before Flynn could reply, he was inside and the door closed with a slam. Flynn tried to smile reassuringly at the girl but it was no good. Away from soft lights and low music, she was a tired woman.

"You'd better rest," he said. "I'll be waiting on the sun porch when you're ready to go out."

ALONE, Flynn took off his clothes and stood under the shower. The cold water felt good against his dusty skin.

He thought about Gwenn. From the first it had never been right. Gwenn had seen him first at the Chez Paree. They had met on the dance floor and she was alluring and lovely in that setting. They had seen each other for a month, always at night and always in quiet, restful places where lovers talk.

She had waited to tell him of Ross. Waited purposefully, he realized now. A quick divorce had been arranged and they were to meet in Mexico City. Flynn knew now that he had lost any love he might have had for Gwenn.

Flynn left the shower, dried himself quickly and dressed in gray flannels. He went along the hall to the second floor porch and sat down in a cane chair to wait for Gwenn. The sun was

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warm and the heady sweetness of roses drifted from the flower booths down the street. His head relaxed against the back of the chair and he slept.

How long he had been there, his face baking in the sun, Flynn did not know. When he awakened the sun was slanting low across the red tile roofs and a slight breeze came from the west. He rubbed the sleepiness from his eyes and stretched.

Odd that Gwenn hadn't called him. She had plenty of time to bathe, apply new makeup, and look for him. Considering that she was eager to impress him favorably, she would have never willingly remained away from him so long.

A feeling of alarm entered his mind. Herb Ross wasn't a man to give Gwenn up after following her from the States to prevent her from remarrying. Flynn entered the hall with some misgivings and walked toward Gwenn's door. He knocked. It was quiet. He pushed inward. The door opened.

Herbert Ross sat on the single chair, his head lowered on the palms of his hands. He looked up, and his eyes were dull and cold.

"She was dead when I came in," he said.

Flynn went to the bed.

Gwenn's body was stretched out across the sheet, her legs hanging over the side of the bed. Her neck was twisted and thrown back at an odd angle. Her lips were swollen and blue and the eyes stared up at him, glazed and sightless. The skin of her neck was bruised. Her dress was torn.

FLYNN wheeled about.

"You fool," he spoke in a low, tense voice. "You damned fool. You didn't have to do this."

Ross arose slowly, steadying himself with one hand on the back of the chair. His eyes were red and his shoulders slumped forward in despair.

"I didn't kill her, Jeff." His lips quivered. *"Honest to God, Jeff, I loved her.* I came to plead with her again. She was lying here—like—this . . ."

Flynn wanted to believe him. The fat man seemed sincere enough, but the evidence was damning. No wild stretch of imagination would put another person in Oaxaco who hated Gwenn.

"You choked her," Flynn said. "No one would ever believe that you didn't."

Ross sat down again, looking away from the body. He tried to gain control of himself.

"I knew you'd say that," he looked Flynn straight in the eye. "That's why I've been sitting here, waiting for Heaven knows what. I couldn't come and tell you."

"When did you find her?" Flynn asked.

Ross was eager to talk.

"It was right after we came up," he said. "I decided to have one last talk with Gwenn. I found the door open and came in. I can't expect you to believe me, Jeff, but it's the truth."

Flynn walked to the window and looked down the street toward the flower show. The carts were gone. The street was dark and deserted.

"Jeff," Ross was close to him, his eyes low. "I want you to see something before you call the police. I—I can't think straight yet."

Flynn turned and Ross walked to the opposite side of the bed. He shuddered, reached out and touched the neckline of the girl's dress.

"Above her heart," he whispered.

Flynn watched as Ross drew the dress away. *There was a circular hole in the white flesh over the girl's heart. It was the size of a silver dollar, clean and deep. No blood soiled the flesh around it.*

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Ross drew the dress up again quickly.

"What did it, Flynn?" he asked in a hushed voice.

Jeff Flynn shook his head. No bullet or instrument that he could imagine would have left the deep bloodless wound he had seen on Gwenn's body.

"I'm damned if I know," he answered slowly.

Flynn put a firm hand on the older man's shoulder.

"I'll do everything I can," he said. "I don't believe now that you killed her. If it helps any, I didn't intend to marry her when I saw how much you cared for her. I was a fool I guess. We'll tell the police that we found her together."

Ross turned and grasped his hand. The grip was warm and grateful.

"Flynn, you're tops. You'll never know how much . . . "

He stopped talking and bent down over something on the floor. He started to pick it up, a shiver passed through his body and he dropped it again.

Flynn picked up the small object and held it between his fingers. It was about three inches long, fleshy and covered with brown scales. He had seen a thing like that before.

The thing in his hand was the cleanly chopped end of a feeler, *like the one he had seen creeping from the wagon of the rose gardener, Trujall.*

"WE'RE going to get out of here," he said sharply. "This is a clue I can follow. We'll call the police and leave before they get here."

"But they'll hunt us down and convict both of us," Ross protested. "I can't let you take the rap."

Flynn's eyes were icy.

"They'll lock us up and we'll never have a chance. If we escape now, perhaps we can find the murderer."

"But where—how?"

Flynn looked doubtful.

"I'm not sure," he confessed. "But we're going to visit the valley of Tipico."

"Never heard of it," Ross answered.

"You'll hear a lot from now on," Flynn said grimly. "It's a garden of roses, and I think—a garden of hell."

COUNT AVON BICARDA owned the valley of Tipico; owned the roses that grew in rank profusion within its warm borders; owned the souls of the people who straggled from the village each morning to tend the thorny, green plants on which his roses grew.

Since the Spaniards had come and gone, the Bicarda family had lived within the protected valley of Tipico and their power had not been questioned.

True, in the village there was one small group who kept to themselves. They neither toiled in the gardens nor slaved on the roads. But they were few and they did not trouble the Count.

He stood beside his horse on the hill above Tipico, staring first across the vast sweep of blood red roses beneath him and then anxiously toward the road that came from Oaxaca.

His dress was the dress of a Spanish nobleman. The flabby, weak face, the dreary eyes confessed weakness of character. A casual onlooker would have thought the Count on a movie set, attired as he was in the silken trousers, long silk stockings and tightly-buttoned white cloak of past centuries.

Closer study might betray the wrinkled stocking and the broken garter that hung at his knee, the torn cuff of his shirt that someone had forgotten to mend. Science would brand Avon Bicarda as mentally unbalanced.

His eyes brightened suddenly and the hand on the bridle tightened with excitement. An ox cart rolled toward him from over the hill. On the board

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seat, a young girl and an old man sat side by side. Trujall, the gardener, was returning from Oaxaca.

The Count mounted his horse clumsily and galloped toward them. At the side of the wagon, he stopped and dismounted. Trujall tapped the oxen with his staff and they halted. The girl watched the Count with surprise and distrust.

Ignoring Trujall, Count Avon Bicarda rounded the cart and bowed low before the girl.

"It is a pleasure to welcome Leona, the daughter of Textan, home once more," the Count said. His lips were set in a leer. "Will you allow me to take you to the village?"

Leona Textan's face paled with disgust.

"My father knows not of my journey to Oaxaca," she protested. "I must hurry straight home to him."

A sneer made the Count's face more simple to read.

"You may as well know that you will not return to the town," he hesitated. "Now or ever."

The girl turned to Trujall, her eyes pleading.

"You begged me to brighten your booth," she accused. "It is your duty to see that I am taken home safely."

TRUJALL'S head came around slowly. His eyes were amused. Planting the heavy butt of his staff in her stomach, he pushed with all his strength. She toppled into Count Bicarda's arms, and a scream of terror escaped her lips. Trujall poked the oxen and the cart rolled away.

Holding her tightly with one arm, the Count called after Trujall and the wagon halted.

"Your task," the Count shouted. "It was again successful?"

For the first time real satisfaction showed in Trujall's eyes. He turned, lifted the cover from the wagon and the Count hurried toward him. Leona Textan dropped to her knees in the dust, tears spilling down her cheeks. The Count glanced hurriedly under the cover and smiled.

"Bigger and stronger," he licked his lips. "You do well, Trujall."

Trujall smiled.

"Thank, you, master," he answered humbly. He turned to the oxen again, to conceal a sneer that was etched on his face.

"Master?" he whispered sneeringly under his breath. *"Fool!"*

He moved forward along the road into the valley.

Leona was on her feet, running toward the timber that bordered the upper valley. Count Bicarda mounted his horse and galloped after her.

Once she fell, scratched her knee and the blood ran from the wound. Looking back quickly she saw that he was almost upon her. She arose and limped forward, too frightened to call out. She reached the trees and ran in among them.

The man jumped from his horse and pursued her. She could hear his heavy footsteps on the soft earth and knew he was close. His arm reached her shoulder and jerked her roughly to a halt.

"Please—my father . . . " she gasped.

"Your father can't do anything," he snarled and tried to press her lips to his. She kicked and clawed him, fighting like an animal.

"You are going to my palace," he said. "It is useless to fight."

Suddenly Count Bicarda felt a heavy hand on his shoulder. He was whirled around, and a fist smashed solidly against his jaw. He went down in a heap, gouging one shoulder into the earth. It stained his white coat.

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JEFF FLYNN turned to the girl, who had slumped to the ground, wide-eyed. He helped her to her feet.

"Are you all right?" he asked.

She nodded.

"Where did you come from?" she asked in bewilderment. "Seeing you here is so . . . so unexpected. No one comes so far off the beaten path . . . "

Flynn smiled at her.

"I came to get some of those roses. Remember, I said I'd be back to buy some?"

He turned to the fallen Count, who was sitting up, rubbing his injured jaw and rather foolishly trying to brush the dirt from his coat.

"Who is he?"

A look of terror crossed the girl's face.

"You shouldn't have hit him. He's Count Bicarda. He rules all of Tipico. He will make plenty of trouble for you."

Flynn shrugged.

"Not much more than we're in now, eh, Ross?"

Herbert Ross came forward, nodded glumly.

"This the fellow we're looking for?"

"No. We want a fellow named Trujall."

Flynn turned to the girl.

"Where is Trujall? . . . and by the way, what is your name?"

"Leona Textan," she answered. "But what do you want with Trujall?"

"We'd like to ask him a few questions," said Flynn grimly. "Where is he?"

There was terror in the girl's voice.

"You must go away! You must not go to him. It will not be wise . . . "

"It will not be wise not to!" exclaimed Flynn. "Will you take us to him?"

Leona stared at his intent eyes a moment, then nodded.

"Yes," she whispered. "I will take you to him."

THE valley of Tipico had a strange effect on Jeff Flynn. He had been vaguely worried since he first saw the fat Count pursuing the girl in the forest. Everything in Tipico went wrong. They were hardly out of the forest, Ross riding his horse beside that of the glowering Count and Leona Textan sitting before Flynn on his horse, when the odor of the roses started to penetrate Flynn's brain.

Tipico was one vast rose garden, stretching red as blood along the ten-mile floor of the valley. He felt the first rich fumes of the blossoms drift up to them as they went down the dusty road. The perfume filled his head and made him drowsy.

"I'd hate like the devil to *live* in this place," Ross said suddenly. "Those flowers are like opium. The smell is so sweet it deadens my brain."

Flynn could see a change in the girl also. She relaxed against him in the saddle, her eyes widened and her lips parted, almost like rose petals themselves. Her breathing was soft and she looked at him through half-closed lids.

"It is always like this," she said. "The valley is so pleasant that we who live here could not stay long in any other place. It is like a spell that casts itself upon us, making us happy where we are."

The horses jogged on slowly. The sun was bright above and they entered the boundaries of the town. Tipico was small—barely a dozen houses, a store and a few warehouses.

Count Bicarda began to bristle, and he grew truculent. Obviously, now that he was in his own bailiwick, he was losing his fear of the Americans. He glared at Flynn hatefully.

Leona saw the glare and she turned pale. She turned to Flynn and whis-

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pered in his ear.

"Please," she begged. "Run away now! While there is time. Take me with you!"

Flynn blinked.

"Take you with me . . . Good Lord, girl, aren't you being just a little . . . " Flynn had intended to say "dramatic" but his lips closed on the word. The fear in her eyes, the tenseness of her body beneath his encircling arm, spelled the sincerity of her convictions.

"No," he said grimly. "No two-bit local emperor is going to scare me out. I've come for a purpose. I want to see Trujall!"

"You will see him!" snarled Bicarda. "And you will see something else . . . *Halto!*"

They came to a halt before a building that Flynn took to be a general store. In the doorway stood a little man, not over five-foot-three in height, with a fierce black mustache that gave him an oddly friendly appearance. Dark, serious eyes hinted at their own ability to twinkle with humor. Right now they were sober and puzzled, and a frown wrinkled the skin at their corners.

"General Harzo!" snapped Bicarda. "Arrest these people!"

HARZO stared at Bicarda. He seemed somehow contemptuous, but at the same time there was an unwilling respect in his eyes. Something that was not fear, but yet was compulsory. Obviously, Flynn thought, Bicarda did have power in this valley—enough even to make this pseudo-general respect his commands.

"What is the charge, Count?" Harzo asked respectfully. But he made no move to comply with the arrest request.

The Count began to bluster.

"That gringo—he struck me. He attempted to interfere . . . "

Flynn interrupted.

"Absolutely, General Harzo," he said. "I did interfere. In fact, I pasted the Count in the jaw—where he had it coming. He was molesting this young lady here, against her will, and I did what any gentleman would do—what you would do in the same circumstances. And if I had time, I'd stay to prefer charges and ask you to lock *him* up."

Harzo turned to the Count.

"What about that?" he asked.

The Count's eyes narrowed.

"I repeat," he said, "this man attacked me. I was merely kissing the girl I have selected as my wife. We are to be married. In fact, we were on our way here to have you perform the ceremony."

Flynn swung down off the horse, lifted the girl down. He looked at her, startled.

"Is that true?" he asked incredulously.

Stark terror was in her eyes. She looked into his a moment, then looked away, tore from his grasp, and ran to stand beside the Count. She uttered no word.

"I'll be damned!" came Herbert Ross' exclamation.

Flynn paled with anger. He wheeled to face General Harzo. He reached forward and clutched the little General's shoulders.

"Listen," he growled in a low voice. "I did the girl a favor, understand? As far as the Count and his two-bit power are concerned, he can go jump in the lake."

General Harzo blinked, but his lips curled into an amused smile. His eyes held a peculiar look of approval.

"Good words, *amigo*," he said. "Now if you will let me go, I will give you some advice."

Flynn let go of him.

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"The Count grows roses here," Harzo said. "The people do as he says simply because they have done so for a thousand years. Perhaps that is why this girl wishes to wed the Count. We shall ask her and see."

The General turned to the girl.

"Do you wish to marry this man?"

She stared helplessly a moment at Flynn and Ross, then looked at Bicarda. His eyes were fixed on her with a glare.

"Yes," she said to Harzo. "Yes, yes!"

"You are not being forced to do this thing?"

"No," she said, face pale. "I am not being forced."

Harzo turned to Flynn and bowed.

"You see, *amigo*, it is all right."

"All right hell," growled Flynn, staring at the girl, who dropped her eyes before his accusing gaze. "But I guess there's nothing I can do about it."

"Do your duty, General Harzo," Count Bicarda spat out. "Or it will go badly with you."

Harzo's eyes flamed, but he said nothing to Bicarda. Instead he turned to Flynn.

"Therefore," he went on, as though ignoring Bicarda's outburst, "it is obvious that you have attacked Count Bicarda in a criminal manner, and I shall have to arrest you."

FLYNN leaped forward, fists doubled.

"Why, you . . . !"

Harzo clapped his hands and a soldier leaped out from behind a corner of the building.

"Arrest them!" snapped Harzo. "Take them over to my office. I will take care of their cases immediately after the wedding—"

He turned to Bicarda.

"—You wanted to have the ceremony immediately?" He waited for a confirmation.

"Yes," said Bicarda. "At once."

Leona Textan nodded dumbly.

Flynn walked across to Leona and grasped her arm.

"I know you're not doing this because you want to," he said. "I know you're afraid of something. Maybe it's the same thing I came here to uncover. Maybe it's Trujall . . . "

Count Bicarda shoved forward, tried to disengage Flynn's hand from Leona's arm. Flynn shoved him roughly back, so that he tripped over a bush and sat down. He ignored the Count's sputtering.

"It is Trujall, isn't it?" he pursued. "Tell me the truth."

The girl looked at him tragically.

"Go away," she whispered. "Go away, far from here. You will only come to harm in this valley. I am doing what I want to do. You have no right to interfere."

Flynn released her arm in bafflement, noting as he did so that Harzo had made no move, or order his soldier to make one, in assistance to the Count.

"Okay," he said. "But I'll find Trujall, and wring the truth out of him. Also, the truth about what happened back at Oaxaca!"

The soldier stepped forward now and motioned with his rifle. Flynn and Ross walked ahead of him up the stairs and into the general store. At the rear of it, Flynn saw that they were in some sort of office. There was a desk, several chairs, and another door. Flynn noticed with amazement that this inner office was cool; air-conditioned.

They were marched into a room with a barred window. The guard sat down outside the open door and held his rifle across his knees. He didn't close the door.

Ross looked at Flynn soberly.

"Well, we're in the clink. But at that, it's no worse than where we'd be back in Oaxaco."

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"No," said Flynn darkly. "But there's something damned fishy in this valley; more than what happened back there. I intend to find it out."

"I hope you do," said Ross despondently. "Because it looks like a murder charge for me, if you don't!"

FLYNN walked swiftly back and forth across the floor, white hot anger burning inside him. Ross sat quietly by the barred window, looking down the sun-swept street. Ross understood Flynn's feelings better than Flynn thought, remembering how *he* had felt when another man took Gwenn away. He didn't speak of it to Flynn. There was nothing they could do.

Ross watched Count Avon Bicarda's carriage come up the street. He saw Leona Textan sitting at the Count's side, her face drawn and pale. The Count was leaning back in the carriage, his eyes closed, face smug. The Count, Ross thought bitterly, was taking the whole thing quite calmly.

The carriage swept by the house and went down the road toward the far end of the valley. General Harzo walked toward their prison, his boots kicking up dust as he walked. Several minutes later another carriage went by. In the seats, several soldiers sat with rifles carelessly held. Their carriage disappeared down the road also. A guard for the Count and his new bride?

The General came in. He carried a stiff, folded document in his hand. Crossing the room he knelt at a large wall safe and put the document inside. Once he had twisted the knob and locked the safe he rose and faced Flynn.

"You can come out now," he said with a smile. "And if you gentlemen will honor me with your presence, we will go out and dine. Perhaps then you can confide to me the trouble and the mission that brings you here."

"What's that?" asked Flynn, astounded.

"You can come out. You are free. You are not, and have never been, under arrest. I am sorry that I had to inconvenience you, but you will understand that it was the simplest way to avoid trouble all around. Count Avon Bicarda is a power in the valley—although not as great as his mad mind conceives himself to be. So humoring him was the best policy. He will never think of you again."

"But that girl," said Flynn angrily. "She did not want to marry him. She was terrorized."

Harzo shrugged.

"She signified her desires very directly," he said. "Come, we will dine. No doubt you are hungry."

He led the way toward a restaurant and they ordered.

It was one o'clock then. At three, the carriage of soldiers returned from their ride down the valley. They brought with them the news that the carriage of Count Avon Bicarda had been attacked by strange bandits half-way to the palace.

The Count had been shot through the heart and had died at once. The girl was unharmed and being escorted to her new home. The carriage of soldiers had arrived in time to fight the bandits, but too late to save the Count.

GENERAL HARZO, his lips stern and face expressionless, ordered the news to be posted at once. Count Avon Bicarda was dead and the valley belonged to his new wife, Leona Textan.

"*Senor* Flynn," Harzo said suddenly, placing his half-empty wine glass on the table before him, "I have a question to ask you."

Flynn looked up with moody eyes.

"I'm afraid, General," Flynn said, "you and I have little to discuss. You

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can perhaps see now the heritage you gave that girl. She's widowed before she reached her home."

"I'm sorry, American, that you think harshly of me. I think it is best that you know the truth. Perhaps you can give me the help I so badly need."

Flynn was watching the mustached man carefully. Ross' head never came up from his food.

"You were angry that I insisted the girl marry," the General went on. "You wonder why . . . ?"

"Insane," Flynn broke in. "I'd like to drag you before the authorities anywhere outside the valley and watch you sober up."

General Harzo rose to his feet.

"It was necessary that, to fulfill my plan, Leona Textan marry Count Bicarda. I had no intentions of letting them reach their home."

Flynn's glass dropped to the table with a crash. Ross stopped eating, mouth open, fork poised.

"You see," Harzo added, "my full name is General Harzo Textan. Leona is my daughter."

FOR some time the three men faced each other, but none of them spoke. Flynn arose, rounded the table and offered his hand to the General.

"Accept my apology," he begged. "I don't know what you've got in mind, but I'm sure you won't allow them to harm your own daughter. If we had known, we'd have kept our mouths shut."

Harzo Textan smiled and took Flynn's hand.

"I know," he said quietly, "I guess I can trust you. Perhaps it will be best if I tell the story of Tipico."

He pushed his chair from the table, crossed to the fireplace and stood before it. A frown passed over his face.

"I have not always lived in Tipico," he started. "Many years ago, before Leona was born, I lived in Mexico City. I was a *politico* at the time, and held some high offices. My wife died at Leona's birth and I asked for retirement. They wanted to do something for me, in return for my services to the government."

He paused, smiled wearily and went on.

"Some one knew of Tipico, and thinking it a quiet, sunny place, suggested that I come here. Oddly enough I was given the governing power of the valley and the Mexican government will back up my word here."

"Have you ever had to call upon them?" Ross asked curiously.

Harzo nodded and smiled.

"But once," he answered. "Since the soldiers came to the valley and the people realized I was the governor, they have done as I say. There was one exception."

"Count Avon Bicarda?"

"Yes!" Anger blazed in the General's eyes. "Bicarda has lived here since birth. Before him was his father-and so back into the years. The family is degenerate and low. They know but one industry. Every year, the petals of the roses are taken to Oaxaca and made into perfume."

"I've noticed an odd thing," Ross said. "The air conditioning in your office, in this restaurant, wherever *you* go."

Harzo nodded and smiled slightly.

"Yes, you are right," he admitted. "That is how I remain free of the spell of the flowers. The people here live in a semi-awakened state. The power of the flowers is so great that they have no will to fight. They stay here and work until they die *or are murdered.*"

Flynn's jaw stiffened. He was thinking of Gwenn. Gwenn with that strange round hole in her flesh.

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"Murder?"

The General's fists were clenched.

"There are many things one does not mention," he said. "But now I can tell you the whole story. The Count needed men and women here to work in his gardens. He also needed them for another purpose. For the second — he demanded one qualification."

"And that?"

"*Death,*" the General answered in a low voice. "They were found dead in the fields. I am sure it was murder."

"But great God, man," Flynn protested. "Surely you could have stopped it?"

"That is where you are wrong. Every flower-drugged man in the valley would have risen against me; if they had cared. I could not act."

"I'D LIKE to ask you a question, General," Ross said. "You married Leona and the Count for a purpose?"

"I had planned that for years," he admitted. "It was the one way of getting control of Count Bicarda. With Leona married to him, I could go to his palace and find out for myself what was happening there."

"But surely there were other ways," Flynn said. "With your soldiers you could have forced your way in and searched the place."

General Harzo Textan shook his head.

"There was but one way to break the power of the Bicarda over this valley."

Ross looked hostile.

"So you did it by marrying your daughter into the family and then killing her husband. The valley of Tipico belongs now to Leona Textan—*and to you!*"

The General's eyes flashed.

"You are a smart man, Ross," he said. "But I am not responsible for the bandits who killed the Count."

"But it was you who sent soldiers after him as the Count left town," Ross said. "Not more than a quarter of a mile separated the two carriages. There would hardly be time for an outside attack."

Harzo nodded.

"That is all very logical," he admitted, "but not the truth."

"I'm not so sure of that," Flynn interrupted. "There are some things I don't like. General, what do you know about Trujall?"

"I don't know . . . " began Harzo worriedly.

He was cut short by a loud commotion in the hall. The door to the room swung open and a soldier staggered in. His uniform was torn and covered with mud. He tried to salute the General and fell forward on his face.

Flynn dropped to one knee and turned the man over. The fellow's eyeballs were turned up queerly and he was gasping for breath.

"General . . . your daughter . . . " Flynn's ear was close to the quivering lips, "Trujall . . . "

The voice faded to a whisper. The dying man clutched his heart and a shiver passed over him. He tried to speak further, but his lips gurgled wordlessly and closed.

Flynn stood up quickly.

"You have horses?" he asked of the General.

Harzo nodded.

"I'll get them." He rushed out.

When the General had left the room, Flynn drew the stiff white hand of the soldier gently away from the bloodied shirt. A whistle escaped his lips.

"Look at that, Ross!"

There was a deep, circular hole in the flesh over the heart. "The same thing that killed Gwenn! We're on the right track!"

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The General came in and two men were with him. He spoke quickly in Spanish and the soldiers picked up the dead man and carried him away.

"Let's go," Harzo said grimly, "and may the Saints protect my daughter until we reach her."

FLYNN and Ross rode close to each other on the big horses Harzo Textan had supplied.

Harzo rode ahead of them, his eyes focused on the building three miles away, that was the Bicarda palace.

Flynn felt a strange sleepiness coming over him. The valley air seemed warm and muggy.

"It's a fight to keep awake here," he said.

The General spoke to them sharply.

"Breathe as lightly as possible. It is the power of the roses," he cautioned. "In my own town I have clean, cool air and I am not affected. Here, men and women go unprotected. The roses numb the brain like a drug."

Flynn watched the palace ahead of them grow and take shape beyond terraced slopes. It was as lovely as the valley. Roses spread up across terraces and about the lawns. Trellises against the walls were alive with red flowers.

"When we get close enough," Flynn said, "I'll drop off behind. You and the General ride straight in and go to the front door. I'll take a look around before anyone suspects I'm here."

They reached the bend in the road where it turned toward the palace. Flynn reined his horse out of sight behind the bushes. He watched as the two men rode up to the palace, tied their mounts and went to the door. As the door opened the General walked in, followed by Ross. The door closed.

For some time Flynn waited. A gathering storm was hastening the dusk. He studied the house. In his mind was the image of those plant tendrils under the cover of Trujall's ox cart. Flynn wanted to see that ox cart and its contents again. Perhaps a search of the out buildings . . .

He crossed the lawn quickly and went behind the palace. There was a small vegetable garden.

He saw the carriage house looming, perhaps fifty yards beyond the garden. The small plot in which he stood was planted with bulb like plants that protruded eight or ten inches above ground. He started to walk among them quickly, caught his boot on the roots and fell.

A tiny, whip-like object snapped out and struck his face. Another wrapped quickly about his boot.

Flynn struggled to his feet only to find that he was trapped. The tentacles had suddenly come alive. More of them were stretching toward him. The tendrils were much smaller and yet he recognized the form. They were small plants of the same type he had seen in Trujall's wagon!

Flynn's feet were solidly held in place now, perhaps a dozen of the tendrils wrapped tightly about his boots. He whipped out his knife, slashed them away. It was a foolish move. Two plants were close to his hands. They flashed toward him and secured his wrists tightly. He jerked with all his strength. Thin, watery stuff oozed from the cut vines. His hands were bloody. The knife fell from his grasp.

One bulb-plant under his body moved. He felt a soft, petal like substance brush across his shirt and the plant or creature, whichever it was, pushed a round snout against him.

Horror stricken, Flynn strained away from the sharp snout and tried to break away. It was useless.

This was the way Gwenn Ross had died!

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THE scaly, eager snout was sucking at his flesh now. His shirt was torn and he felt the thing cutting into him bringing blood to the surface.

Flynn shouted hoarsely.

"Ross, help. I'm behind the house in the garden."

Almost at once he heard a door open and saw three faces over the porch rail above him. The light from the room flashed out across the garden and he could see other plants waving and leaning toward him. The pain over his heart was terrible.

"This is it, Ross!" he shouted. "Trujall's plants are killers. Help me!"

Flynn saw Ross wheel about and send a crashing blow into Trujall's face. A gun exploded; a shot sang through the air. Ross cleared the rail with a leap and hit the ground on his feet. He carried a huge knife; a machete snatched from where it hung on the wall, obviously for just the purpose for which he was now going to use it.

Trujall's curse came from the porch. There was the sound of a scuffle. Flynn could no longer see the porch. His eyes were filled with pain and his body contorted, fighting the awful tendrils.

Ross swore loudly and came wading in. The huge knife swung wildly on all sides. Sometimes he staggered and seemed about to fall. Then, howling oaths at the top of his voice, he tore away a blade covered with wriggling tendrils and came on.

At Flynn's side he reached down and sent the knife shooting into the plant under Flynn's body. The suction stopped and the thing dropped away. He cut the bonds from Flynn's body and dragged him to the edge of the garden. Flynn fell forward on his face and lay still. He was breathing hard.

"Entertaining," it was Trujall's triumphant, but angered voice. "But you have ruined my new crop of plants. For that you will all pay."

Ross helped Flynn to his feet. The General had been overcome in his scuffle on the porch with Trujall. He was covered now by the same pistol that menaced Flynn and Ross.

"Thanks, Ross," Flynn recovered his breath. "I didn't know what I was walking into."

They mounted the porch and faced Trujall. His face held a smile of complete triumph.

"Where is the girl," Flynn faced the dwarf, his fists clenched. "You've done something to her."

Ross took his arm.

"Never mind, Flynn," he urged. "Leona is safe. We've seen her already. We'd better take it easy."

Trujall held his gun ready.

"That is wise," he said. "We have already had enough excitement. To wander around here longer might result in a disaster that could not be avoided so easily. Enter and be entertained."

THEY entered a high, well-lighted room. It was pleasantly furnished and warm. Trujall motioned to a couch at the far end of the place. Leona Textan was there, lying with partly closed eyes. The room was rich with the scent of roses and they were piled about the girl.

A strange mixture of relief and anger spread over Flynn as he stood there, looking at her. She was clad in the same rough dress, but the flowers spread a perfume about her that made the whole room shimmer under her spell.

"You will be seated?" Trujall asked, pocketing his gun. "There will be coffee."

Flynn wanted to go toward the girl, but something robbed him of energy. It didn't seem important.

"She is all right?" he asked the General.

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Harzo Textan nodded listlessly.

"The roses," he explained. "They make her tired and restful. Otherwise she is safe."

Flynn felt tired. He wanted sleep very badly. A serving woman brought a tray of coffee and he sipped his while the others drank. Leona closed her eyes and slept. Her father went to her once, and felt of her forehead. He seemed satisfied.

"She has had a hard day," he announced vacantly. "It will be better for us to stay here tonight and go to the village with the morning.

Trujall went to the door.

"There are only myself and the serving maid here," he said. "I am sorry about the incident in the garden. They are but a hobby of mine and I was angry when I saw the plants destroyed. If you stay out of my gardens you will be safe."

He went out and they heard him leave the porch.

The maid came and led them to their rooms. Flynn was worn out. He sank to the bed and was sound asleep before he had time to remove his clothes.

FLYNN awakened suddenly, his body covered with perspiration. It was dark. His head ached dully. Why was he here in this bedroom? He could not remember leaving the lounge where Trujall had faced them with the pistol. Leona Textan had been stretched out before them, asleep on the divan.

He had succumbed to the sweet odor of the roses, and Trujall's insistence that no harm would come to them. Flynn remembered accepting a cup of coffee from the house maid and watching Ross and General Textan do the same.

That was it. The coffee had been drugged. That, and the roses!

Flynn sat up quickly, saw that he was fully clothed. He rushed to the door.

He stepped into the hall and listened. No sound came from the rooms below. It seemed sinister. Trujall was the power behind this garden of hell. He used the people of the valley like pawns, never soiling his own hands with murder. He left that to . . .

Flynn thought of Leona. The girl had been in the main lounge below the staircase. The thought of her shocked his brain more fully awake.

Half-way down stairs, Flynn stopped short. A high-pitched scream of terror came from the rose garden behind the house. He rushed across the room and out on the high porch. Leona Textan was visible several hundred yards away. She was running between long rows of rose bushes.

The moon made her shoulders glisten. Once she looked back—screamed again and rushed onward. Flynn's boot struck something. He reached down and retrieved the heavy knife that Ross had used earlier in the evening.

Flynn cleared the rail with one leap. He ran swiftly across the lawn and into the rose garden after Leona.

"*Stop, or I'll shoot.*"

Flynn saw the stubby figure of Trujall on the porch with pistol aimed.

"Go to hell!" he shouted and kept on running. Leona had disappeared now. A shot rang out and the bullet whistled over his shoulder.

The second shot hit the bricks of the carriage house close to his head and sang away into the bushes.

"Leona," he shouted. "Leona. Where are you?"

The silence was maddening. Forgetting Trujall, he ran over the soft dirt and down the lanes of rose bushes.

HE RAN onward, glancing back once to see a light visible on the second

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floor. Perhaps Ross or the General had finally awakened. He shouted something hoarse and wordless over his shoulder, hoping one of them would hear the sound.

There was a small opening ahead. It was perhaps ten feet square and bordered by the rank, luxurious growths of roses. At the far side he saw Leona, cowering down. Her body was twisted as though she were trying to run—to go farther, but couldn't move. Her lips were opened in a round O of horror and one arm was thrown before her face as she sought protection from her pursuer.

Flynn saw the thing that had caused her panic and stopped short. The other octopus-like plants had been bad enough. Now he knew he was looking straight at the thing that had killed Gwenn and the soldier.

It had the same general characteristics as the others, but it was almost as tall as a man. The thing, plant or animal, walked on nine short feeler-like legs. It moved swiftly, its thick, scaly body vibrating smoothly as it moved. A half-dozen long, root-like feelers protruded from the body. They reached out and wavered in the air, the tips reaching three feet from the body. Its head was a net of muscular fiber with a sharp, cup-like opening at its top.

The cup was the identical size of the wound he had seen on Gwenn's body.

From the edge of this cup a blossom grew. It was a type of orchid, huge and spotted, but unclean. Out of its center came two feelers that evidently gave it a sense of touch and smell that allowed it to pursue its victims.

The thing was crossing the clearing slowly, warily, seeking the girl. It knew she was there. The footsteps had halted and the prey was close.

Flynn went forward slowly, the knife raised over his head. Close to the creature, he brought the knife down in a wide arc. It struck from behind, just below the cup-like neck. The spotted blossom flopped to the ground and the neck fell with it.

The creature whirled around and feelers swept out and around Flynn's waist. Red blood started to pour from the cleanly severed neck. Flynn dropped his knife and tried to release the tentacles that held him. The girl came toward them. Flynn felt the tentacles go around his throat and remembered how easily Gwenn had been strangled.

Leona waited until the feelers were tightly wrapped about Flynn. He was on the ground now.

She clutched the knife firmly and pushed it deep into the creature's body. The movement stopped.

The feelers grew limp one by one and fell away from him. Shaking from the strain, Flynn stood up slowly and kicked the thing away from him.

SHE RAN to him quickly, throwing her arms about his neck. For a moment Flynn forgot Trujall and the men at the house. He was conscious only of the frail, lovely girl in his arms.

"You understand now why I married Avon Bicarda?" she whispered.

Flynn nodded.

"Your father told me everything," he said.

She snuggled closer.

Men were coming from the house. He took his arms from her and turned to see Ross, Trujall walking before him, as they came through the roses. Trujall saw the bloody monster that lay at Flynn's feet, and sobbing, knelt on the ground before it. Ross looked down with cold hatred in his eyes. He carried a pistol. Flynn recognized it as Trujall's.

"I heard you shouting," Ross said quietly. "Found Trujall in the garden

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trying to release more of these things. He's got a whole cage of them behind the carriage house."

"They didn't escape?" Flynn asked.

Ross shook his head.

"Still behind bars," he said. "We'll starve them to death. Trujall had to fool with the door and I took the liberty of kicking him in the stomach and taking his gun away from him."

The ugly face of the dwarf turned up to Flynn. Blood stained the man's hands where he had fondled the dead creature and tears were in his eyes.

"You killed him," he accused. "You killed my pet."

Ross' eyes were flinty.

"And I'll kill you!" he snarled.

Flynn shook his head.

"No, Ross. When the General awakens," he said. "I think he'll take a certain pleasure in sentencing Trujall and putting him before the firing squad."

"Trujall, why in hell did you pick on my wife?" asked Ross.

Trujall had arisen slowly, his long arms hanging at his side. He shrugged his shoulders.

"I had to have a white woman," he said slowly. "She was the only one in Oaxaco. Many Mexican women and men have given their blood to my *king-plants*. I could give life to the tuber bodies of the plants by shooting certain injections into them. They did not react to natural emotions without the blood of humans in their body."

Flynn was filled with a deep disgust.

"But you," he asked coldly. "What were you gaining by this?"

Trujall shrugged his shoulders.

"I have had everything I wished from the house of Bicarda," he admitted. "The *king-plants* were my hobby. They drank blood and became things alive and powerful. I raised them to make up in a way, for my own lack of power. You see my body is very ugly. Not at all tough and strong like my pets."

Ross' face was a mask of loathing.

"You murdered these people and gave their blood to these—these creatures of hell, for no reason other than to satisfy your own lust for power?"

Trujall did not answer. Instead he was on his knees again, carefully gathering up the remains of the thing on the ground.

Ross turned to Flynn and his eyes were pin points.

"You'd better take the girl away from here, Jeff," he said.

Jeff took Leona by the arm and led her up toward the house. They were hidden from the two men in the roses.

"What is he going . . ."

Her lips remained parted, but her voice was broken by the sharp crack of the pistol. Two more shots sounded behind them. Jeff stopped, standing very quietly. He thought he heard a groan of pain, then quick footsteps in the dirt.

Ross caught up with them, and walked toward the house without a word. They reached the garden and Flynn looked away across the peaceful rose gardens and then back at the strong, handsome house. He took Leona close to him in the darkness.

THE END.

THIRTEEN FRIDAY THE 13THS!

SUPERSTITIOUS? How would you like to see a calendar in which Friday the 13th appeared every month? There has been a lot of discussion about revising our present calendar to one in which every month had twenty-eight days and there were thirteen months in the year. Thus, the first would fall on a Sunday every month, and we would have thirteen Friday the 13ths to worry about every year. As twenty-eight times thirteen equals 364 some provision would have to be made for an extra day to round out the year, and for two of them on leap year.

There are a lot of pros and cons as to the advantages of equalizing the calendar, but the con that springs to mind is this: rent would be paid thirteen times a year instead of twelve!

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HOW WE SEE

By A. Morris

PERHAPS no organ is so important to normal life, in the matter of senses at least, than is the eye. The human eye is formed as a part of the brain and later migrates away from it but nevertheless maintains a large connection with it. The eye alone is not the most important part of sight, there are several other organs participating in the process.

The eye itself is nothing but a sensitive layer upon which light rays are focused and a lens to project them as well as dark chambers through which the light rays pass. The entire structure may well be likened to a camera with a lens diaphragm and a dark chamber with sensitized paper on the inside, but well protected against other rays. The rays of light enter the eye with incredible speed. It was thought for a long time that the light had odd powers by means of which it shot out particles which lit up an area. The physicists have proved this impression to be wrong and we, too, can see this if we wonder why we cannot see in the dark.

If we look at our eyes in the mirror we can see that there is a white portion with blood vessels in it, a small circular colored portion and a black area within it called the pupil. The color in the circular portion, or iris, is responsible for much beauty being attributed to eyes. The iris is the diaphragm of the eye. It is a muscle and as such can contract limiting the size of the pupil. A good and simple experiment to prove this is to stand under a dim light with a mirror in hand. The size of the pupil will be large, to permit entrance of the maximum possible light. Then shine the light of a flashlight into the eye and watch the pupil become smaller.

Just back of the pupil there is a small cavity with some fluid within it. This chamber is the space between the pupil and the lens of the eye. The lens is a hard crystalline mass which has a definite refracting power and it focuses the rays of light upon the retina. The retina is the sensitive plate of the eye. It merits a good deal of discussion. Between the retina and the lens we find another larger cavity which is also filled with fluid. This fluid as well as the fluid of the cavity between pupil and lens serves to keep the shape of the eyeball constant.

On the retina is found a group of layers of cells. It is interesting enough to note that the picture which is received by the retina is upside down and that we see upside down, since nothing occurs which would turn the picture over. This is quite interesting and likewise almost unbelievable. We do not see things upside down, and hence there must be a mechanism which translates this situation. This mechanism is purely psychological, we do not see, we interpret. We do see all things upside down, but we interpret them as being right side up and have done so for such a long time that we cannot and do not change our ideas even when told the truth.

It must not be thought that the pupil of the eye is a real structure, it is only a reference point and appears in its characteristic color only because of the fact the empty space has no light in it. The covering of the pupil is part of an eye layer called the cornea which is an aid in direction of light rays.

There are two types of cells in the retina, where there are cells, and there are places which do not have cells at all. There is one in particular which does not have cells and by a simple experiment shown in most books on eyes and optics it can be demonstrated on one's self. This is done by marking an X and moving a pencil some distance away, the distance depending on the person. At one time the person can see the pencil, and the area around, but not the X. This of course requires the use of both eyes. The cell types are rods and cones. The cones are sensitive to color, and the rods are sensitive to shapes of objects and differential color tones. When light strikes these cells, chemical changes take place which stimulate a nerve which then passes to the brain. The nerve impulse stimulates other areas and so we see.

The process is then simple. The eye which can be rapidly moved by use of muscles in the orbit receives light rays. These rays are shunted through the cornea of the pupil to the lens and projected on the retina. The lens accommodates for nearness and farness by increasing or decreasing its length from front to back by means of suspensory ligaments and muscles which control them. These ligaments pull the lens out flattening it or permit it to contract and become like a ball. An optical effect ensues and we are enabled to see near and far equally well. People whose lens cannot adjust so well are forced to wear glasses. The rays passing through the lens pass through a fluid filled cavity and enter onto the retina causing certain chemical reactions which ultimately affect the optic nerve, or nerve of the eye and this in turn affects the brain so that we see.

A very odd circumstance presents itself in connection with the location of the visual centers in the brain. They are not in the front part of the head as would be suspected, rather in the back part of the brain. This long passage is one which is readily understood in the light of evolution. Naturally here is where extra pressures on the brain or nerves will have their bad effects, and many a person who is in sore trouble because of their lack of perfect vision may have this to blame. It is there nonetheless and tumors of any type are often the cause of obliteration of function.

THE END

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In her possession were the secrets of the ancient alchemists

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MISTRESS of the DARK

by

ELROY ARNO

JEFF STERN glanced mechanically at his watch as the sudden flash of a parachute flare spread light across the shadowy width of Oxford Street below. Crouching close to the protecting roof wall, he watched the plane dive suddenly and heard the roar of its motors change in pitch to an ear-chilling whine. Two hours ago the first Nazi bombers had appeared above London. In those two hours the city had broken wide open under the flame and roar of the barrage.

The diving plane leveled off a bare hundred yards above and zoomed upward into the blackness as its load of heavy bombs were released from their racks. Stern heard them hit a block away and the series of explosions that followed drowned every other sound from his ears. He stood up slowly.

On the other side of the battered sand-bagged roof, Joe Archer staggered to his feet, his slicker torn and dirt-covered. Archer's dark eyes flashed under the rim of his battered regulation helmet.

"Ain't you had enough of this fire and brimstone yet?" His voice came to Stern above the steady clatter of guns in the park down the block. "Let's get outa here before they knock the stairs out from under us."

Jeff Stern turned, his slim muscular body protesting every move. He grinned and in the uncertain light his once tanned face was white and dirt streaked.

"This is a funny kind of business," he said as Archer reached his side. "We've got to get as much information as possible about the explosives those boys are using. The only sure way I know is to catch one of their eggs in our arms and that doesn't appeal to me, somehow."

Archer shrugged.

"That last plane must have been

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A London cellar gave up a girl and Roger Bacon's secret. Both combined to promise sure defeat for the Axis

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tossing them at my wrist watch," he growled. "Lucky they came out of that dive a little late."

He followed Jeff Stern across the roof to the open skylight. Stern swung himself over the edge of the opened skylight and dropped to the attic floor below. Archer followed, swearing aloud as his heavy frame struck the floor.

They entered a dark, deserted hallway. Stern followed the wall downward until a faint glow from the street told him they were on the ground floor. They stood before the massive oak doors that led into the street. Stern hesitated and suddenly put his weight against them. The building shook under the force of a new explosion. Nazi planes seemed to be coming in more closely spaced now.

"Start moving!" Archer pushed him from behind in his eagerness to get out. "I'm looking for the nice thick wall of a shelter."

TOGETHER they dashed into the blackness and across the cobblestones at a right angle. Half way into the street, a parachute flare caught them full in the glare of white light. High above, the sudden whine of a dive bomber sounded as it peeled off and rocketed downward.

"Hit the dirt!" Archer shouted. Stern dropped face downward, his fingers digging at the rough surface of the street.

The Nazi leveled off just above the roof tops. The shrieking whistle of the bomb drowned a string of curses from the lips of Joe Archer.

With a roar, the building behind them seemed to bulge out and dissolve into flying bricks and mortar. Jeff Stern's helmet seemed a thin, useless thing. Scattered debris ripped the air above them. Smoke and dust mushroomed out and over the two men on the pavement.

Joe Archer groaned suddenly and was then silent. The bedlam of falling walls struck Stern's ears as he reached quickly toward his companion. His fingers closed over Archer's motionless wrist.

Thin and far away, a woman's scream for help came to him.

"Please—someone help me . . . . .

Stern hesitated, wondering if he should get Joe to safety or try to help the owner of the frenzied voice.

The cry faded under the sounds of the falling walls and something struck Stern across the shoulders. He went to his knees, and felt a second blow on the steel of his helmet. He felt his face strike against the pavement, an unbearable weight on his shoulders, and Stern knew no more.

THE London office of Chemists, Inc. was small and unpretentious. Major Walter Steele had a good reason for choosing the musty old house in the east end of the city for his overseas headquarters. Chemists, Inc. was under secret orders from the United Nations ruling board. Any undue attention shown the firm was not welcome.

It was after midnight when the last bombers roared away. The sudden howl of the all clear sirens brought Steele from behind the big desk. Through the window he saw a mud streaked ambulance take the far corner on two wheels and grind to a halt in front of the brown stone building.

Mary Steele, wearing a leather tunic, gloves, and whipcords that molded her slim hips, climbed out quickly and waved a reassuring hand at him from the street. He watched her mount the high steps and slip into the hall door before he turned away from the window. Far across town, the section around Oxford Street blazed high,

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lighting the sky with its blood red flames. The door behind him opened and Mary Steele came in. She tossed her gloves on his desk.

"Bad night, Dad?"

Steele groaned.

"Worst yet," he admitted. "I'll venture that Nazis will brag for months about their attack on London, April sixteenth. I stayed in the cellar for a while. After that I said to hell with the Axis and their bombs."

"So," Mary interrupted, "you came up stairs and curled up behind that big desk of yours. Dad, I worry more about you than I would a whole family of children."

Steele shook his grey head impatiently.

The girl came close to him, putting her hands on his wide shoulders. Her eyes were very serious.

"Dad, do you think we're making any headway?"

Steele's head dropped forward a bit. The stubborn curve at the corners of his mouth relaxed.

"Now you listen to me, young one. I've got Von Strom and Jeff Stern on this job with me. We may take some time, but we'll handle the job right for all of that. You stick to the ambulance division and let Chemists, Inc. handle its end of the deal."

MARY STEELE went to the chair behind the desk and sat down. Swinging her feet to the desk top, she studied her father for several moments. Under her steady scrutiny, his smile faded and the tired look came back. Mary's eyes grew soft.

"Let's not kid ourselves, Dad," she said. "The government told you to turn out an explosive that will surpass anything the Axis can produce. You chose Jeff Stern because *I* said he could handle any job given him. You chose Von Strom because he's a wizard in the lab." She faltered. "But I'm not sure of any of us now. Jeff hasn't been able to get the right clue and you hate to say so because you know I love him. As for Von Strom . . ." She stopped abruptly, her lips curling slightly.

"As for Von Strom—what has he done?" The voice, mild and a bit humble, came from the laboratory door behind her. Twisting about, she faced the stolid efficient chemist, Hans Von Strom.

"I'm sorry, Hans," Mary said. She stood up. "I'm a little unkind tonight. I guess the thought of those devils up there dropping their death on helpless people upsets me."

Von Strom didn't move at once. His expression was humble—a silent plea.

"I'm sorry that my parents were German," he said. "Sorry that I bear their name. I have always tried to be a good American."

Major Steele seemed to bristle.

"That's enough, you two," he said sharply. "Before the war you were the best of friends. Now the ghost of Hitler pops up every time Von Strom comes into the room."

"Sorry," Mary said, and she meant it. Von Strom entered the musty office, absently wiping his hands on his apron. He looked out the window. Away toward the business district the flames were leaping higher, showing no signs of abating.

"What an inferno!" He pointed across the blazing roof tops. "I hope Mr. Stern and Mr. Archer are safe."

The girl behind him stiffened, her face white with sudden fear.

"Dad, is Jeff out again tonight? Hasn't he taken enough chances?"

Steele shrugged.

"Apparently not," he answered. "Joe and he left shortly before nine. Said he wanted to see some more first hand

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action and try to find out just what effect the Nazi bombs were having on larger structures."

Von Strom turned from the window, his brown eyes on Mary.

"They planned to observe from the roof of the Thorndyke store on Oxford," he said. "If you care to go there, I'd like to accompany . . ."

"Mary's ready to turn in," Steele said. "She's had enough running around for . . . "

Mary Steele was already at the door, her gloves half on.

"I *never* get enough running around," she said sharply. "Not while I don't know what's happened to the boys." Then to the hesitating Hans Von Strom, "Come on, Hans. No hard feelings."

TOGETHER they hurried down the worn steps and into the ambulance. As they bounced around the corner she managed a quick look back toward the window and her father.

"Dad's got to get some action soon," she said, partly to herself, "or we might as well fold up and go back to the States."

"I know . . . " Von Strom's eyes were glued to the burning skyline ahead. "I only hope the action is favorable."

Oxford Street was a mass of burning rubble and piled bricks. It had been roped off and bobbies patroled the ends of the street. They hurried out of the car and ran forward. Because of her uniform, Mary got through the ropes without any questions, and they raced toward the business section.

Suddenly it dawned on the girl that the building they sought was no longer there. She stopped, staring with terrified eyes at the crater where it had been. On the pavement were pools of blood where someone had lain. Broken walls jutted upward, stark boundaries to a once great building. Below, pungent smoke drifted from the open pit of cellar.

She turned around, facing the stolid, emotionless face of Hans Von Strom. She saw concern in his quiet eyes, and suddenly grew weak with fright. His arms, strong and understanding, were about her.

"I—I guess they must have left—before. . . ?"

Her lips trembled. Her mind was trying to believe that Jeff was safe. It was useless. Terror and horror swirled into her heart.

Von Strom tried to smile reassuringly.

"I'm sure they are safe," he said. "Stern knows how to take care of himself."

His slightly-stooped figure seemed to waver suddenly, then swell to grotesque size. As from a great distance she heard his voice, but the words were unintelligible. And then a black mist seemed to envelope her mind, and she knew no more.

"JEFF!" The voice was small and distant in Jeff Stern's ear. "Jeff, snap out of it."

Stern opened his eyes, and put hesitant fingers to the dull, throbbing pain at the back of his head.

He sat up, heard the thin whine of sirens from a distance and remembered where he was.

"Guess I must have passed out," he said slowly. "Are you all right, Joe?"

Joe Archer was on his hands and knees, his face dripping blood. He grinned lopsidedly.

"This ain't Heaven," he said. "A brick and me connected. I just came around. Had to dig you out from under half the street."

He slipped his arm under Stern's shoulders and helped him up. Stern

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looked down the length of the burning street and the full meaning of what the Nazi bombs had done, made him angry and sick. Suddenly he remembered the woman who had screamed for help.

"Joe! Remember hearing a woman cry out just before that last bomb fell?"

Archer grinned, sweeping a dirty sleeve across his bloody face.

"An angel, maybe?" he asked.

"No! I'm serious. Just before I fell, I heard a girl's voice coming from the building we were in. It seemed to come from somewhere in the cellar."

Archer shook his head.

"No one could live in that mess," he said. "Sure it wasn't your imagination?"

Stern didn't answer. He stood quietly for a moment, made his decision, and started across the street toward the open pit. Archer was close behind. Ahead of them, broken, twisted stairs led downward into pitch blackness.

"Roger! Someone help me, please!"

"That's it," Stern shouted over his shoulder. "She's still alive."

He dashed frantically through a scarred opening and into the roofless building. The voice had come from below. He stumbled downward, and Archer came close behind him, swearing with every step.

They reached the cellar bottom, and in the half light of reflected flame Stern saw the lower tunnel. From the side of the cellar wall, a stout oak door had been blown from its hinges. Beyond this door and down a slanting tunnel, Stern could see a faint glowing light.

"Roger! Hurry!"

The girl's voice could not be mistaken now. Stern went toward the opening swiftly, paused and stared downward with puzzled eyes. Before another door at the lower end of the tunnel, the girl stood waiting.

SHE was like no one he had ever seen. Standing in the faint, phosphorescent glow from the room behind her, she looked as fresh and clean as a dream. Her hair golden and smooth, crowning her head like a halo. She was dressed in a costume, theatrical in its daring simplicity. Tight black silk clung to her body. A crimson robe was caught about her white throat and fell to her thighs.

Close behind Stern, Joe Archer stood still, his big mouth open.

"She's—she's a witch," he gulped. "Jeff, look on her shoulder."

Perched with wings outspread, a huge bat fluttered from its place on her right shoulder. It seemed an evil symbol of the place itself. Then without warning, the girl swayed forward helplessly and fell to the rough stone steps. The bat flailed the air above her head.

Stern ran downward three steps at a time. He knelt at her side and lifting her in his arms, turned her over gently. He cradled her head and shook her gently.

"This is the screwiest setup I've ever seen." Archer was at his side. "How a doll like her got down here is beyond me."

Stern smiled.

"She's coming around," he said. "Something caused her to faint. She seems very weak. I don't understand what kept her from coming up, once the raid was over. She doesn't seem to be wounded."

The girl's eyes opened suddenly and Stern saw fear in their depths.

"Please," she asked, "take me to Roger. I meant him no harm. I have been punished long enough."

"Roger?" Stern helped her up, and she stood close to him, head bowed.

The question implied in Stern's voice seemed to surprise her.

"You know who Roger is?"

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"Sorry," he admitted. "Never heard of the lad, but if you'll give us the address, we'll see that you're delivered safely to him."

The girl's head arose and her body was suddenly taut with anger.

"Fool," her eyes flashed. "There is no one in England who does not know of Roger. Take me to him at once."

Somewhat stunned by the sudden flare of temper, Stern hesitated. The girl was about to protest further, but the excitement had been too much. Her face turned white and she started to slump forward again. Stern put both arms about her, lifting her slight body tenderly into his arms. She allowed her head to sink back against his shoulder.

"I'm so sorry," she said softly. "About Roger. I'm afraid much has changed. It makes little difference now."

"There'll be time enough later," Stern said. "Right now the raid is over and I think we'll get you to the hospital."

"Raid? Hospital?" She pronounced the two words slowly, as though they were strange to her. "I do not understand."

There were a number of things that puzzled Stern also. Bits of conversation that would take a lot of explaining when the time came.

Joe Archer was already half way up the tunnel.

"Let's get out of here," he urged. "The whole damn outfit will be caving in on us any minute now."

"I think," Stern said to the girl in his arms, "that after we have you safely to bed, there's a long story you'll be wanting to tell me."

HE carried her upward, into the once more quiet night. If the things she saw above ground were bringing any questions to her mind, the girl did not voice them. At the top of the steps, Stern paused. Her head was pressed close to him and the soft hair smelled good, close to his lips.

"This is good," she said softly. "I have not rested for a long time."

Looking down at her, Stern wanted to press his mouth to her soft lips.

"I should think not," he agreed. "That's the worst raid we've had in months."

She did not reply.

Joe Archer was waiting impatiently.

"Joe," Stern said, "use those bricks and broken planks. Seal up the end of that lower tunnel so we can come back and look it over when we have the time."

Archer grinned.

"You've already got the buried treasure," he said. "But if you say hide the tunnel, I'll hide the tunnel."

In the street, Stern hesitated, waiting until Archer caught up with them. They stood alone in the moonlight. The heavy guns were silent. It was a strange, battle scarred London. Fire crackled and flickered on every side. The street was alive with men. The girl in Stern's arms was silent, breathing lightly. She said nothing, but Stern felt somehow that the London that greeted her was even more of a shock than it was to him.

He realized then that they had been on Oxford Street for nearly three hours. Major Steele would be concerned for their safety. If Mary had come in after they left, she would be frantic by this time. He looked once more at the girl in his arms.

"Feel well enough to walk?" he asked. "We've got to deliver you and get back to the office. The boss will want to know what's happened to us."

She nodded silently and slipped to

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her feet. Removing his trench coat, Stern wrapped it tightly about her. Half hidden by its folds, she smiled up at him.

"Would you like to tell us who you are?" he asked. "I'm Jeff Stern. Any time I can help, I'd like you to remember me."

Her face was crimson and she looked away.

"My name is Ann Masters."

It was like a confession of shame and she seemed surprised that he showed no emotion.

"How about Roger?" Joe Archer asked suddenly. "And where do you live? You know, home and the hat-rack? Where do we take you?"

She looked very small and alone in the darkness.

"I have no home, now. There is no Roger. It is all gone . . . "

Archer looked quickly at Stern. Odd that the chemist showed no surprise.

"Then you're going with us," Stern said quietly. "I had an idea something was wrong. I think I understand something of what is troubling you. Perhaps, later, you'll tell me more."

WHEN Mary Steele awakened, she was at first aware only of the dull headache that made everything lopsided and wrong. She braced herself on one elbow and tried to sit up. Then Oxford Street and the horror of not finding Jeff Stern flooded back to her.

She had fainted.

Then where was she now? This strange little room? She pressed her clenched fists into tightly closed eyes and felt warm tears run down her cheeks. The room, when she opened her eyes again, was frightening. The walls were dirty and the cot on which she lay was cheap and uncomfortable.

Panic stricken, she sat up. Her gloves were missing. Her clothing was torn and filthy. There were no windows in the small room—nothing but a closed door.

She stood up, swaying a little, and dashed to the door. Before her hand closed over the knob, she knew it would be locked. She shook it under her hand. Impatient at first, she grew angry.

"Let me out of here!"

Her voice bounced quickly around the four small walls. No answer. A fit of violent shivering swept over her body.

There was the sound of slapping water under the floor. She listened intently. She must be a prisoner somewhere along the water front. *Hans Von Strom! He had brought her here!*

What the kidnaping could mean, she could only guess.

Perhaps Von Strom would use this to frighten her father into giving up his work. Perhaps even worse than that.

Footsteps sounded in the hall beyond the door. They came close, slowly, as though deliberately spaced to frighten her. A key turned in the door and it opened. Hans Von Strom came in. It wasn't the quiet laboratory worker she had known. His body was stiff and upright and his eyes were flashing.

"I see you have awakened." His words were sharp. "I hope you suffer no ill effects."

Mary Steele faced him, doing her best to hide her fear.

"You will take me home at once," she said sharply.

Von Strom chuckled without humor.

"We may as well understand each other, Miss Steele," he said.

He crossed the floor and she sank back on the cot, looking up at him with wide eyes.

"You have long accused me of being a fifth columnist." Von Strom's face

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was gray and expressionless. "Well, in a way you were right. I am a member of the German Intelligence. There is no harm in you knowing that now."

Her eyes never faltered from his.

"I have been fair with you from the first," she answered. "You've never heard me say a thing that would hurt you in Dad's eyes."

Von Strom sat down at her side. She tried to draw away from him but thick fingers settled tightly around her wrist.

"You needn't fear me," he said tonelessly. "I will talk and you will listen."

"You're a brave man, Hans," she twisted her hand from his. "Take full advantage of a woman while you can. When men face you . . . "

He flushed.

"I have been working for my Fatherland for many years," he said. "It became necessary to join your father when we found that he planned such important work."

"I tried to warn my father of that," she answered coldly. "Yet, I can still see no reason for bringing me here. Before, I did you no harm. Now, if I have one chance . . . "

Von Strom smiled.

"The harm is already done," he answered. "Perhaps you are wondering why tonight of all nights, your friend Jeff Stern was in the direct line of our bombing planes?"

SHE waited for him to go on. He arose and walked toward the door. With his back against the panel he smiled at her.

"It was I who suggested the Thorndyke Building as a splendid place for Stern and that nit-wit, Archer, to observe the enemy. It was also I who made sure they would be directly in the path of German bombs. They were blown to hell without a chance to escape. My men did their work well."

Like an angry tigress, Mary Steele was on her feet and dashing toward him. She heard the grunt of pained surprise that escaped his thick lips, as her body struck hard against him. Her nails sank into his face.

"You fiend! You horrible, murdering fiend!" She didn't realize that her voice was escaping in a high pitched, frenzied scream of hate.

"You have made a mistake, *Fraulein!*" His arms tightened like steel about her waist. The breath jerked out of her suddenly and she sobbed with pain and fear. Her head fell forward against his chest.

"You—you beast!"

"I have tried to make this an impersonal task," his voice purred softly in her ear. "I have attempted to forego the pleasure of personal contact and follow my line of duty alone. Now that you have thrown yourself into my arms . . . "

She tried to wrench away from him but his arms were tight about her.

"Let me go. *Let me go!* I'll—I'll—"

"You'll do nothing, *Fraulein.* You have taunted me before your father. You have showered your attention on Stern. Now we are alone and I'll have my way."

He pressed her back across the room. Her arm was half around him, and she felt something hard in the pocket of his coat.

A gun!

She could take that chance. The chance to escape by killing a man.

The cot was under her. She sank down upon it and he partially released his grip on her waist. A tight smile played across Von Strom's face and perspiration beaded his forehead.

"That is better, *Fraulein.*" His voice was appeasing, gruff.

Her hand was in his pocket now and

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the butt of the pistol in her fingers. She smiled up at him and as he bent over her, she drew the gun into the open. With all her strength she pressed the trigger. "Click!"

Von Strom jumped away from her, his face black with rage.

"You fool. You little fool!"

The trigger had fallen on an empty chamber. With a snarl he rushed toward her, trying to knock the weapon from her grasp. She swung it downward as he came and the steel struck his temple and glanced toward the floor. With a grunt of pain, Von Strom went to his knees and rolled over on his back. He lay still. Blood dripped from the barrel of the gun over Mary Steele's wrist.

She looked about wildly. He had not locked the door when he came in. It opened easily and she looked down the long, dark hall of the deserted building. A quick glance backward convinced her that Von Strom would remain silent for some time. Her feet clattered against the uncarpeted hall as she fled wildly down the short flight of stairs toward the door that glowed dully below her.

In the street, she knew this was the waterfront. The fog was white and ghostly about her and a single yellow light burned in a pub across the street. She went toward it, hoping there would be someone who would help her.

A man loitered by the curb on the far side of the street. He stepped forward as she approached. Mary Steele tried to avoid the outstretched arms, recognized the face that was half hidden under a dock worker's cap and held her at arms' length.

"Jeff! Oh, Jeff Stern! Thank God you're all right. I was so afraid."

STERN held her tightly. Tipping her chin up, he kissed her lips, then held her at arms' length.

"Stout fella!" he said "Now that we've found each other, where is Von Strom. How did you escape?"

She drew him back into the shadow of the building, wide eyed and incredulous.

"You—you knew?"

He shook his head.

"Only part of it," he confessed. "We returned to your Dad's office and he told us you'd gone with Von Strom. I've suspected the German for some time. Last week I found out he took a room in this section of town. I followed him to this block and heard that he was known at the ale house. When you didn't come back, I suspected he had brought you here. I didn't know the exact address, so I had no choice but to try each house. I had been at the job for an hour when you walked into my arms."

With his jacket around her, Mary Steele felt better. She told him what had happened.

"I—I had to hit him on the head," she finished. "I don't think he—he's dead."

Stern's hands were clenched at his side.

"If it weren't for you," he said slowly, "I'd hope he *was* finished. It would save us all a lot of trouble."

The street was silent. Fog had drifted closer to the ground and the single light in the pub was no longer visible.

"Should we send someone to take him away?" Mary asked.

Stern smiled grimly.

"I'm afraid it isn't as simple as that," he confessed. "No one but you and I know who Von Strom really is. There must be others who work with him. If we can keep him locked up where they cannot find him, we may be able to break up the entire gang at once."

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"But how . . . ?"

"Leave that to me," he answered. "Right now I'm afraid you'll have to go back with me and show me where you left him."

They crossed the street quickly and Mary Steele retraced her way toward the room she had so recently escaped. Light was visible through the open door. Von Strom was where Mary had left him.

"Well, young lady," Stern said, dropping to his knees beside the German. "Nice job you did here. Still breathing, worse luck."

"Jeff!" Mary stood over him, still wondering how she had found him alive. "What happened tonight. Von Strom said he deliberately planned to have you and Joe killed. We thought you both were in the . . . "

Her voice quivered with emotion.

"I know." His hand folded over hers. "Von Strom meant to frighten you all he could. We left the building just before that direct hit. We would have been away sooner, but something happened in that building that may turn out to be a very important development."

VON STROM was quiet and white at Stern's feet. He stirred and opened his eyes slightly. The lids dropped again and the movement went unnoticed by the others.

"I don't understand," Mary said.

"I'm sorry." Stern would have welcomed the chance to tell her more if only he himself were sure. "I'd rather wait. I'm sure that in the ruins of the Thorndyke Building we've discovered a treasure so vast that it will change the entire course of the war. A power that will place us on the winning side in six months."

"Oh! Jeff." Mary's eyes were shining. "I had faith in you from the first. I knew if Dad would give you a chance . . . "

"I'd like to take the credit," he admitted. "But I'm afraid it is impossible this time."

"Tell me about it," she asked.

"It will all sound crazy to you," he cautioned, "but if anything comes of this thing, you can thank a woman's scream, and a man who, seven hundred years ago, learned to make gold from any metal that came under his touch."

Her eyes were wide with wonder. Mary Steele did not understand, and yet she was confident that Jeff Stern must know what he was talking about.

He was smiling again, holding her close to him.

"Look, kid," he said. "Don't ask me to explain a thing now. It doesn't even make sense to me yet. I have a few clues that I found and a lot of imagination to work with. Meanwhile, we've got to get Von Strom out of here and to the office. I'll have him watched and we'll take care of him in due time."

"And the secret?" she asked. "Can you tell me soon?"

"Soon—I hope," he promised, and bent over the limp figure of the man on the floor.

Von Strom's eyes were closed tightly. He forced his body to go limp and Stern lifted him to his shoulder. Hans Von Strom had heard much in these last few moments. There was yet time for escape. Perhaps it was well that Jeff Stern was not dead. He had mentioned treasure and the Fatherland could use treasure to much advantage.

MAJOR STEELE watched quietly as the ambulance drew up before the darkened house that contained the laboratories of Chemists, Inc. He was relieved to see Jeff Stern get out, open the door for Mary and stand as she climbed wearily from the car. Steele

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had hesitated several times during the past two hours, wanting to go in search for them and at the same time, realizing that he had no idea where to go. There was also the matter of Joe and the oddly dressed girl on the second floor. Stern and Joe Archer had returned with her. Stern had insisted that she take Mary's bedroom and had assigned Archer as her watch dog.

Steele shook his head, tried to puzzle out just what there was about her that could be so important and suddenly bent closer toward the glass, bewildered at what he saw outside.

Hans Von Strom must be hurt.

Stern had opened the rear door of the ambulance and between them, Mary and he were lifting a blanket covered stretcher from the interior. Steele left the window quickly and managed to reach the door in time to hold it open for them. The pair came in quickly, wordlessly. Steele rushed into the study and readied the couch.

"Hans?" he asked. "Is he hurt?"

Stern dropped his end of the stretcher a little abruptly and turned toward the old man.

"Not half as bad as he should be," he said. "He had Mary locked up in a water front dive. The man's a Nazi spy."

"Why! The ungrateful . . . "

"Never mind, Dad." Mary Steele drew the window shade quickly and Stern drew the blanket off the outstretched German. "We've got him tied up so he'll cause no harm. Jeff says we should keep him out of sight for the present."

Steele shot a questioning glance at the young American and Stern nodded.

"I've got a hunch Von Strom isn't the head man in London," he said. "They are trying to put us out of business. Von Strom told that much to Mary tonight. If he is missing long enough, we may be able to trap the others into showing their faces. I think it's worth a gamble."

In spite of himself, Steele chuckled.

"This is becoming what the boys used to call a full house," he said. "Joe hasn't come down since you told him to keep an eye on the girl upstairs. Hadn't you better tell him he can eat now?"

At the mention of a girl, Mary Steele looked at Stern questioningly.

"Say, Jeff Stern, *one* girl in this outfit is enough."

Stern smiled.

"I guess an explanation is overdue," he admitted. "I suppose you, Major, have also been doing a little wondering about the girl in the dancing costume?"

"You're right," Steele answered gruffly. "And so will Mary when she gets a look at her."

Quickly Stern explained what had happened when he and Archer had been bombed, heard the cry for help, and returned to the wrecked building to find Ann Masters. When he had finished, Steele shook his gray head slowly from side to side.

"Damn funny," he muttered. "There's more to this than meets the eye."

"Right," Stern agreed. "That's what I thought. In fact, I made a few discoveries that may be very valuable to us."

"Then she *is* the girl you were talking about when you said we were on the trail of treasure," Mary said. "It all depends on her?"

STERN sat down at the head of the couch on which Von Strom was lying.

"In a way—yes," he admitted. "I'll admit that so far, it's all crazy—impossible. Yet, if what I saw and imagine are true—who knows?"

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He stood up quickly.

"At least it's worth a gamble."

Steele paced across the room impatiently.

"Damn it, man. *What's* worth the gamble? Let us in on this deep secret of yours."

Stern glanced down at the figure of Hans Von Strom, and noticed the German was breathing more smoothly. His eyelids flickered open and he seemed bewildered with what he saw. His lips opened and a scowl crossed his face.

"What is the meaning . . . ?"

He tried to arise but firmly tied ropes on his arms and legs prevented him from moving.

"I demand to be released at once."

Steele towered over him.

"I'd like to release you by knocking that filthy head off your shoulders," he growled. "For the time being you can be thankful that we need you where no one can find you."

Von Strom tried to protest but Stern broke in.

"I think," he said, "that we can put him in the other room on the second floor. There's a good lock on the door and no windows for him to fall out of. Perhaps a little time will convince him that his tongue was made for some other reason than to lie."

A string of oaths whipped from Von Strom's lips. Steele lifted him from the couch and sent a fist crashing into his mouth. The German sank down on the floor like a bag of sawdust and Steele held his fist gently.

"I shouldn't hit a man who can't fight back," he said softly. "But when I think of what he meant to do to Mary, I can't help it."

He reached down and with a twist of his body, lifted Von Strom to his shoulder.

"Lead the way," he said. "We'll lock up one Nazi where he can't hurt our cause for a few hours."

VON STROM was, for the time being, where he could do no harm. Joe Archer reported that all was well. Ann Masters had slept quietly since retiring. Archer sat with the others in the plain, comfortable office.

"I tell you, Jeff," Archer said suddenly, "that place gave me the creeps. I—I got the feeling that we were sort of going back into time and seeing something that doesn't exist any more. You know, the bat and that old tunnel, and the way she's dressed. Damned if I wouldn't hate to go back there."

Stern dropped the papers he held in his hand, stood up and reached for his helmet.

"I'm going back now," he announced. "But if you're afraid of the place . . ."

"And I'm driving."

Mary was at his side, waiting. Stern turned to her, knowing he must not let her go.

"Sorry," he said. "This is a man's job. We haven't any right prowling around in that mess. God knows at what minute the whole remaining structure may cave in."

"I don't give a darn," she protested. "Jeff, it's my place to be with you. After what happened tonight, I want to go with you every night. We're good luck to each other."

Joe Archer was waiting at the door, his coat on.

"Make up your mind," he said. "We better be moving before daylight. There'll be officials hanging around there when the sun comes up."

Stern hesitated, then bent over the girl. He kissed her quickly on the cheek.

"Sorry, pardner, this is my job. You and your Dad keep your eyes on the two upstairs. When Ann wakes up,

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try to make her comfortable. I've a hunch she will be very puzzled by her surroundings."

He followed Archer outside and they climbed into the car.

"Oxford street," Stern said. "And don't spare the horse-power."

THEY found the remains of the Thorndyke Building, entered the cellar and in five minutes Archer had helped him clear away the debris that covered the entrance of the lower tunnel. The place was dark and musty. Stern drew out a pocket flash and sent the beam of light searching down the dark hole.

"Here goes nothing," he said, and started down the well-worn steps. Archer followed a good distance behind, muttering under his breath. They reached the lower end of the shaft where Stern had first seen the girl, Ann Masters. A huge door closed the end of the tunnel completely. It was on this door that Stern now focused his light.

The panel was black with age, and solid. On its surface Stern made out several clearly defined pictorial markings.

"Joe," Stern said. "See those designs. What do you make of them?"

In the darkness, Archer's voice was hollow and respectful.

"Looks like a kid tried to draw pictures," he said, "and didn't have much luck at it."

For a moment Stern was silent, sending the ray of light up and down against the door's surface.

"Those *pictures*," he said finally, "are the symbols of alchemy. The symbols of a science a thousand years old. No chemist lives today that wouldn't secretly like to know what alchemy really accomplished. I think, Joe, that we are on the brink of finding out."*

Archer shivered.

"I'm on the brink of catching a damn good cold," he said. "Let's see what this alchemist stuff is all about and get the hell out of here."

Stern pushed the door slightly with his foot. It moved inward. He grasped the worn handle and opened it. Dull, stagnant air rushed from the opening beyond. Holding the light in a shaking hand, he sent its beam over the sill.

Archer's breath sucked in noisily.

"A lab," he said in a hushed voice, "but like none I ever saw before."

Stern nodded.

"Come inside," he said, "but be careful that you disturb nothing. I want a look at this place before anyone else knows it's here."

Archer followed him slowly across the little room, brushing webs from his face as they fell in shrouds about him.

The room was barely eight feet square. A single, waist high table covered its center and on the table were row on row of dusty, age-pitted crucibles and instruments. The floor was littered with broken glass and odd bits

* Alchemy was the great-grandfather of chemistry. It was the science of transmutation of the elements; more particularly of the transformation of base metals into gold. In modern usage, alchemy designates the art of chemistry as practiced in olden times before it had been placed on a scientific footing. Alchemy was based on the idea that all matter is made up of one substance which appears in many forms. Therefore, according to alchemists who dabbled in what at that time was often termed black magic, all matter could be changed from one form into another. Because gold has always been man's greatest dream, much time was spent on formulas that were supposed to change lead and other base metals, into gleaming, yellow gold. However, it is not true, that although many of these men were useless dreamers, all of them did nothing to improve our present field of science. For example, Bacon, living in the twelfth century, is credited for inventing many things. He is supposed to have given us the first gun powder, microscope and telescope. Witchcraft and alchemy, however, went hand in hand.—Ed.

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of equipment. The walls, constructed of great rough rocks, were hanging with soot and webs.

Stern crossed to the table and ran his finger lightly over its top. A light streak showed in the thick dust, as it clung to his finger. He whistled softly.

"The girl must have been in here," he said. "Yet, there seems to be no mark . . ."

His eyes focused, in the dim light, on the odd couch pushed into the far corner of the room. Archer's gaze followed Stern's own and the big man's mouth dropped open.

"God God, Jeff," Archer whispered. "It couldn't be . . ."

THE couch was ages old. It must have been brought here from some old court. Dust a half inch in thickness had settled over it. In the center of that dust was the clean imprint of a human figure. A set of single tracks led straight to the door. They were the footprints of a girl.

Stern went toward the couch, and in his heart he was satisfied. It all fitted neatly into place.

The girl had been too weak to climb the stairs. She had cried out for Roger, and been angry with them when they failed to respond to the name. As wild as it seemed, there was but one explanation.

Seven centuries ago, Roger Bacon had worked at his science of alchemy, somewhere in London. Records indicated that his mistress had displeased him. She had disappeared, according to early texts, and soon after, Bacon had been thrown into the jail of London for ten years, on the charge of witchcraft.

The name of Roger Bacon's mistress, listed in remote court records, was Ann Masters.

The whole thing staggered Jeff Stern. Yet, he realized that he had expected something like this from the first. The bursting bombs must have broken open the door to this secret laboratory. Something had aroused Ann Masters from the coma she had been in. The secret of her remaining alive would yet be solved. For the present, he must find the papers, the records of Bacon's work that must be here.

Stern pivoted to the startled Archer.

"I can't tell you what we've found, for the time being. Start looking through that old case over there for papers. You may find formulas here that will help us solve our toughest problems. The man who owned this place could foresee our use of planes and battleships. He may have gone farther and designed objects for our use."

Stern was already busy himself. He knew something of the working habits of such men as Bacon. There would be a case, no doubt, containing the collected work of the man. He started on the table. Dusting it carefully, he found only the rough boards, with occasional alchemist markings carved into the top. The instruments he left as they were. Perhaps, later, they would be valuable.

Archer was busy with the heavy cabinet by the wall. He had dragged out a stack of early books. Now, rising to his feet, he held out a loose sheath of rolled parchment.

"Here's something," he said. "Maybe you can make sense out of it."

Stern took the roll eagerly, spread it out on the table and bent over the folds. The paper was yellow with age. He sorted several from the pile and then stopped suddenly, reading with difficulty, the strange English script. The words were faded, barely discernible.

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"Plans for the fudden change of bafe material to rare gold."

He read slowly, deciphering the queer use of the letter 'f' in place of 's.' As he read, an unbelieving scowl crossed his forehead. The script covered the entire page of parchment. It indicated the equipment and the formulas to be used. The last few words held Stern spellbound.

"Example of this work found in the rare metal ftone on my bench. Collected at random from the ftones of the field."

Bacon had made an ordinary stone into a solid chunk of gold, and had left it on the bench. Stern searched eagerly for the thing, remembered at last that there had been no gold of any kind in the room when they entered it, and gave up.

"Fairy tales?" Archer asked. "I got a hunch all we'll get out of this is a paper weight from the desk."

He held a blackened, lumpy looking mass at arm length for Stern to examine.

"Found it on the floor by the end of the table," he said.

STERN grasped the object quickly and turned it over in his hand. This, then, was Roger Bacon's gold. He smiled a little sadly. Men had dreamed of such things before. For a few hours perhaps, Bacon had turned the stone yellow and fooled himself. Now, after nearly a thousand years, it had reverted to type and turned dusty and black once more. He rubbed it between his fingers and felt the thin, black dust collect on his finger like a fine pumice. The odor of it was strong and powerful.

Archer had finished his search of the cabinet. He stood by the door, now, impatient to get out of the place. Stern folded the paper in his hand and stuffed it into his pocket. He rolled the remaining parchment and tied it with the old cord.

"If nothing else," he smiled ruefully, "we've uncovered a nice find for some historian. I had hoped . . . "

"To find gold hanging from the ceiling," Archer interrupted. "Well, it's just as well. Now we can go to work all over again. Let's lock this joint up and get out. I've had enough of this place, personally."

A sound in the tunnel behind him caused Archer to turn suddenly on his heel. He found himself staring directly into the barrel of an automatic pistol.

The sound of footsteps, the heavy door opening, also brought Stern around with unpleasant suddenness.

"I trust I'm not intruding on a treasure hunt." Hans Von Strom stood just outside, his face a cruel mask, the gun in his hand pointed with deadly aim at Stern's face. "I had an appointment with you gentlemen and it was with some difficulty that I was able to keep it."

Stern leaned back against the table, trying to push the roll of script out of sight on the far side. Von Strom was expecting something of the sort. He was in the room with a bound, pushing Stern roughly to one side.

"I'll take that."

His hand darted out, grasped the roll and slipped it into his coat.

Archer was the first to regain his speech. His face was dark red with anger, as he waited for the gun to waver.

"How in hell did you . . . ?"

With the papers in his possession, Von Strom seemed more at ease. He backed toward the door again, careful that they did not get behind him.

"How did I escape?" He chuckled. "Quite a simple matter. I asked Miss Steele for food, knowing her father

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would deliver it himself. He's not as strong as a young man. The plate slipped from my grasp, I bent to pick it up, a quick twist of the wrist and my fine old friend, Major Steele, was writhing on the floor. I do not think he will see me again, now that I have the secret of the gold formula."

It was Stern's turn to speak. He hadn't moved since Von Strom had entered the room. Now, still leaning against the table, he watched the German with half closed eyes.

"I assume from your talk about treasure," he said, "that you overheard my conversation with Miss Steele."

Von Strom bowed shortly.

"You assume much," he said pointedly. "Yes, I overheard. Such talk means much to my government. A few hours to digest this material and perhaps Germany will be in a position to dictate even stronger peace terms than you ever imagined."

"And meanwhile," Archer asked, "what do you intend doing with us?"

Von Strom grinned.

"Nothing," he answered, looking around the tiny, rock-lined room. "I will leave you where I found you, with only one difference."

He stepped outside the room quickly, and the silence was shattered as the heavy door slammed closed. When Von Strom spoke again, his voice was muffled and deadened by the heavy planks.

"The door is held firmly in place by a heavy beam, gentlemen," he sneered. "There is air inside for a few hours. After that . . . "

His footsteps retreated along the tunnel, and the tiny cell was silent again. Archer groaned.

"And me thinking that the worst thing that could happen, would be the walls falling in. Looks like we're in a jam, Jeff."

Stern drew from his pocket the paper he had so carefully placed there a few minutes before.

"This," he said, "is our only reprieve. Von Strom knows enough about chemistry to recognize the papers he has as useless. He'll come back again, searching for the true formula. When he does, we'll be ready for him."

"AND now the girl is gone," Steele said. He stopped talking, drew a tired hand over his bandaged head and pushed his feet to the desk top. "I tell you, Jeff, we've got to get to the bottom of this thing in a few hours, or hell's to pay."

Jeff Stern stopped pacing up and down the office and sat on the edge of the desk. Opposite him, Joe Archer, somewhat the worse for wear, sat beside Mary Steele on the davenport.

"How did you happen to think of looking for us at the hidden laboratory?" Stern asked.

Steele shook his head.

"It was Mary," he admitted. "After Von Strom hit me over the head and escaped, she was worried about you. She spent a while bringing me around. It must have been while she bandaged my head, that the girl Ann Masters escaped. When Mary found she also was gone, there was nothing for us to do but find you and Joe at once. We had a little trouble finding the tunnel, removed the beam that held the door closed, and you know the rest."

"And how!" Archer added. "We could have lasted about one more hour if you hadn't got us out of that hole."

Stern's mind was following the events of the past twenty-four hours. Von Strom had what he thought was the secret process of making gold. The girl, Ann Masters, was loose somewhere in London. She could know nothing of what would happen to her if Von

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Strom's men located her. Stern knew the gold formula was valueless. Could he, should Von Strom come back, convince the German that the search for riches was useless? He doubted it.

A sudden knock sounded on the outer door.

Steele stood up.

"Never mind," Archer offered, "I'll get it."

He was back in a minute, carrying a small sealed envelope. He passed it to Stern. Surprised, Stern took the envelope, saw his name scrawled across it, and opened the flap. He read the three lines of quaint writing with quickening heart.

"Jeff Stern, please come at once to the dwelling, 46 Dempster on the Thames. I need you but you must appear alone—Ann Masters."

"Anything that will help us?"

"What?"

Stern looked up blankly.

"Anything that will put light on this mess?" Steele asked again, a little impatiently.

Stern folded the note quickly and slipped it into his pocket.

"Perhaps," he answered a little grimly. "At least I'll know in a short time. I've got to leave now. It's necessary that I go alone. If I'm not back in two hours, you'd better send the authorities to this address."

He scrawled the address, 46 Dempster on the Thames, across the desk blotter and slipped into his coat. Mary stopped him at the door.

"From Ann?" she asked.

"Yes," Stern said. "Don't you worry, kid. She's old enough to be your great-grandmother."

He opened the door quickly and went out.

Mary Steele made a rapid decision. "Come on, Joe," she said. "We're going to keep an eye on Jeff. He's not so good when it comes to taking care of himself these days."

46 DEMPSTER was in the squalid, waterfront section of the city, not far from the room where Von Strom had first held Mary Steele captive. The address itself meant little to Stern, but the appearance of the big, run-down house put him on guard. A flight of stone steps went half way up the front and ended at a heavy door. He climbed them slowly and let the old knocker rise and fall several times. To his relief, Ann Masters herself opened the door. She had changed her clothing. The costume was gone, and in its place was soft, translucent silk. The robe alone covered her from the low neck line to her toes. It was a silky, blue stuff that floated like a cloud around her slim body.

"I thought you would come," she said.

The door closed behind him, and Stern found the hallway dark and drab when compared to the lovely girl at his side. He followed her without question into a large room that bordered the hall. Ann Masters sat down on an old fashioned love seat by the window. Her soft, vibrant beauty looked strange and out of place in the tomb-like house. From the very first, Stern had wondered how and why she was here. She could know nothing of the city. She didn't fit into this place any more than she fitted into the queer, vault-like hole under the Thorndyke Building. Staring into her deep eyes, he had to shake himself to make the story of Roger Bacon sound true.

"You are puzzled by me?"

"Can you blame me?"

She nodded a negative reply and bent forward toward him.

"Believe that from the start I would do nothing to harm you." Her voice

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was soft, almost a whisper. "If, in the next few hours, strange things happen, always know that I am at your side, trying to help."

Her hand was soft and warm on his. He sat close to her, and her nearness was subtly intoxicating.

"I did not leave my room of free will. There are men in this house. They forced me to come here and to write that note to you. No! You must show no alarm. They are watching. Make believe you are talking of personal things."

Her arm crept around his neck and drew him close. In spite of himself, Stern liked the contact. He sat closer and, pretending to laugh at what she had said, slipped his arm about her smooth waist.

"You have been in Roger's laboratory?"

"Yes," he answered. "It is true. You are the Ann Masters . . . ?"

Her head dropped a bit and the long lids covered any expression in her eyes.

"Yes," she confessed. "If you have guessed that, you must know the rest. Someday when there is time, I will tell you the whole story. I was kept alive by a strange fluid that *he* put into my body. I would have been there for ages, had not the force of an explosion let oxygen into the cell and revived me."

Stern shivered.

"I owe my life to you," Ann said softly. "You are a great man, Jeff Stern. I can make you the greatest man in your world. You must trust me every moment, every hour . . . "

He shook his head quickly.

"I promise," he said. "I promise to believe in you in spite of everything. It's a privilege I'll always hold sacred."

"IT IS difficult to interrupt so touching a scene."

Stern jumped to his feet, and the girl on the lounge cowered back, frightened by the heavy set, determined Von Strom. The Nazi was alone at the door, a satanic grin spreading over his heavy face.

"You have done your job well, little one," Von Strom smiled at Ann Masters.

The girl drew her robe about her, not daring to move. Her eyes were on Stern, imploring him not to believe. In spite of what seemed to be a complete betrayal, Stern felt somehow that Ann Masters had deemed his capture necessary. He had promised to trust her, and Stern was a man of his word. His fingers touched hers for a moment and he squeezed them lightly. Then he arose to face Von Strom.

"It seems," he said dispassionately, "that we have a habit of meeting many times in the same day."

"And this, the last time, is the most pleasant," the German said. "It was your good fortune to escape the last trap. Now you have walked into the London headquarters of our little group of agents. It is not safe for us to leave you alive this time. We take the information we need and your body will be found in the Thames. Simple, like that."

He snapped his fingers and two husky, waterfront hangers-on stepped into the room. Stern waited patiently as they strapped his arms and legs with leather belts. When the time came for him to fight, Ann Masters would give the word. Until then, he was at the mercy of Von Strom. The man's eyes, small and pig-like from too much drink, held no hope for him. It would all depend on the game being played by the partly-clad girl on the couch. Stern hoped fervently that she knew what she was doing, and more important than that, that she was on his side.

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JOE ARCHER slowed the black car down until they were creeping along the row of slum tenements of Dempster Place. At Number 35 Dempster he stopped, switched out the car lights and motioned Mary Steele to get out.

"Just a short distance away," he whispered. "I'd rather park here and see if we can get in without them seeing us."

The girl nodded. Her heart was in her throat. Ever since Jeff Stern had left in the afternoon, she had known that she must follow him. There was no use kidding herself. Mary Steele was so much in love with Stern, that at this moment she was burning inside with fear for his safety, and a hatred for the girl, Ann Masters, who had asked him to come here alone.

46 Dempster was a great, hulking house set back from the street.

Archer stood a few houses away, watching the dark entrance.

"I don't like it a bit," he said to the girl at his side. "We can't just walk in the front door."

"Why not?" Mary asked. "If we try to creep around, they'll see us and we'll be in the soup. Let's walk right up to the door. If we see that Jeff is safe, we'll leave. If not, we'll pretend to leave, and go for the police."

Joe Archer scratched his head.

"Things are too darn simple the way you figure them out," he complained. "Something always happens to complicate them before we get through."

"Come on," Mary started toward the steps. "There's only one way to find out what's going on in there."

Archer pressed the heavy knocker down with his fingers. Silence. He tried again and heard shuffling footsteps approach the door. It opened slowly and an old woman poked her head through the opening. She wore ancient slippers and a dirty house dress and her gray hair was covered with a dark green dust cloth.

"Well?"

"H—hello," said Joe. "Does Ann Masters live here?"

"She does."

"Could we speak to her, please," Mary interrupted. "It's rather important."

The woman hesitated, glanced behind her and opened the door wide. It was dark inside and for an instant Mary Steele saw nothing. The door behind them closed quickly and she took Archer's arm. Footsteps sounded in the darkness. They were heavy and business-like against the floor.

A man came from the shadows, and in one hand was the heavy outline of an automatic rifle.

"We meet again." Hans Von Strom stood with legs apart, cradling the rifle carefully in the crook of one arm. There was little expression on his face but the eyes were red and slitted with anger. "This time we have a cage from which I do not think you will escape."

Archer twisted about, only to find that the old woman had produced a snubby automatic from her dress. She trained it at Archer's head. Her face was split by a wide, toothless grin.

"You people just go right up and make yourselves at home in the *guest* room," she cackled. "Miss Masters will be with you, soon."

THE "guest room," in which Von Strom had locked his prisoners, was a long, narrow chamber in an upstairs section of the house. It was sound proof and only one door entered from the room at the front of the house. The guest room contained three chairs, a battered table and nothing else.

"What *I'd* like to know," Joe Archer moaned, "is why we ever let that

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damned Nazi get away from us in the first place?"

Jeff Stern, his face a study of conflicting emotions, sat beside Mary. For an hour he had been waiting for word from Ann. She had promised to help. At least he had detected in her actions a desire to do something for him.

"Perhaps it's as well that Von Strom *did* escape," he answered finally. "Now we know where the Germans have their hideout. If we get a few breaks, we may be able to do something yet."

He looked down at Mary, and smiled.

"I only wish you would stay at home part of the time," he said. "We can't afford to take needless chances with you here."

Mary Steele frowned.

"It seems that *you* are the one who usually needs help," she protested. "Besides, I don't like the idea of you getting notes from girls when you have to see them alone. It isn't safe."

Von Strom's entrance saved Stern from further explanation. The Nazi was worried. He wasted no time getting to the point.

"Stern, you and I have nothing to hide from each other on the chemistry angle," he sat down opposite them, making sure his back was to the door. "Those papers I took from you at the old laboratory are useless. I'm pretty sure you know where the true formula is. I want it."

Stern leaned back comfortably in his chair.

"Sometimes, Von Strom," he answered slowly, "I see you as a big, blubbering wind bag. What gives you the idea in the first place, that there *is* any treasure?"

Von Strom swallowed the insult with a smooth smile.

"If this is to be a game of wits," he answered. "We'll play it that way. I know that you found something I didn't. I heard you tell Miss Steele that you *thought* you had something important. That's enough, knowing you, to make me feel there is no doubt that you have made a valuable discovery. I'm going to find out what it is."

Jeff Stern stood up.

"You've put your cards on the table," he said. "I'll play mine. I did have the wild idea that the secret of making gold had been discovered. I know now that I was wrong. You're on the wrong track, Hans. All you're going to get from the whole business is trouble."

Von Strom was on his feet, his face twisted with rage.

"That's your answer." He backed toward the door. "Now, I'll give you mine. The girl Ann Masters will live for five minutes. Unless you knock on that door before those five minutes are up, I'll put so much lead in her body that she'll sink in the Thames like a load of bricks."

He stamped angrily from the room and the door slammed behind him.

"MAYBE you'd better tell him, Jeff," Archer said finally. "I hate to see the kid murdered."

"Please, Jeff." Mary Steele's eyes were filled with tears. "I'm sorry I accused you of playing around. Save the girl."

Stern was silent. He knew that outside somewhere, Ann Masters would die if he did not help her. What he could do was the question.

"Von Strom forgets one thing," he said aloud finally. "I have no knowledge that he doesn't know about. The paper in my possession is supposed to be a formula for gold. Actually the stuff turns to a black, worthless substance."

He drew the small, stone-like sample from his pocket.

"This," he announced disgustedly,

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"is Hans Von Strom's gold."

Archer groaned.

"That puts us in a swell mess," he said. "When Von Strom finds out we're passing black rock onto him, he'll have us all shot."

Some of the powder had separated from the rough surface of the stone, and covered Stern's hand. Absent-mindedly he reached for a match and placed a half smoked cigarette between his lips. Scratching the match across his shoe, he cupped it in his palm. There was a sudden flare of light and the dust in his fingers flashed into flame. Quickly he slapped his hand to his shirt and the flames died. Joe Archer came forward in his chair, face white as a ghost.

"Good God," he shouted. "The dust, it burns."

Stern looked at his hand ruefully.

"It sure does." Then, "Joe; Mary. Do you realize what we've got? The sudden flash, the intense heat. *This stuff isn't rock. It's gunpowder.*"

Mary drew her handkerchief quickly, wiping away the flecks of burned powder in his hand. Perhaps, after all, Jeff Stern would be able to do something now.

"Sometimes," she said tenderly, "I think blind luck follows you every step of your life."

Stern controlled his voice carefully. They must work fast.

"That laboratory belonged to Roger Bacon," he said. "He made tons of gunpowder before anyone else knew what the stuff was."

"Lucky for us, he did," Archer beamed. "We'll blow the daylights out of this place now."

"I think we could," Stern answered. "If I'm any judge, it's more powerful than anything I've ever seen. Unfortunately we can't just blow our way out of here."

Archer's jaw dropped.

"And why not . . . ?"

"Ann Masters," Mary said. "We've got to save her."

Stern started toward the locked door.

"Do what Von Strom tells you to do; don't start anything, and leave the rest up to me."

He started to pound on the door with all his strength. The solid piece of rock gunpowder was tucked safely into his pocket.

THE ancient laboratory of Roger Bacon was packed to the door with visitors. The tiny room, its wall flickering under candle light, seemed like a strange tomb.

Hans Von Strom had taken no chances that his prisoners might escape. They had come in the night. There were three carloads, including Ann Masters, Stern, Archer, Mary Steele and five officials of the German Intelligence Staff.

Von Strom stood near the table, a triumphant grin on his ugly face. Across from him, Jeff Stern worked busily over the freshly cleaned crucibles.

"We have humored the fool," Von Strom turned to his associates. "We have brought him here as he wished. We have promised the things he asked for. He has no choice now, but to produce the gold we have waited for."

The men nodded quietly. They had their orders to kill without mercy, once Jeff Stern was able to show them a test tube of the metal they wanted.

Mary Steele sat quietly on the old lounge, an arm around Ann Masters. The girl from beyond time was frightened. Her small body shook in the embrace of Mary's arm.

Archer wondered what Jeff had on his mind. They were still under guard. Archer knew, even as the first steamy liquid arose from its crucible and foamed to the table, that Jeff Stern was

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on the spot. If he tried to use the explosive here, they would all be destroyed. Perspiration stood out in heavy beads on Archer's forehead.

Jeff Stern was stalling. He hadn't planned things this way. Von Strom's decision to bring them all here was his alone. Stern had wanted to come alone, and in his mind, he knew that death for him wouldn't be hard as long as the girls and Joe were safe. Now he must think of another plan.

Von Strom was growing impatient.

"We have no useless time to spend here," he growled. "You have destroyed the papers. Hurry, that I may witness the manner in which you produce the stuff. We must get out of here without delay."

Stern nodded. His eyes arose once to the girls on the couch. To murder them here, in cold blood . . .

His eye caught the roving, worshipping depths of Ann Masters' stare. The girl's lids were half closed. She was trying to say something, plead with him. In Jeff Stern's heart there was love for Ann that went deeper than life itself. It was from her that he had drawn strength, a purpose that he had never possessed before they met.

Now he stared at her across the table as his fingers went about the task they must do.

FROM the floor, he extracted a large stone. It lay on the table before him. The magic fluid was ready. He lifted the test tube and felt the heat of it through his gloved hand. Hans Von Strom came close to the table, bending over the glass. The men by the door, guns ready, were motionless, waiting.

Mary Steele arose and Ann Masters was at her side. She still shivered under the light robe, but Stern knew it wasn't the cold that troubled her.

Suddenly he was sure that Ann Masters knew the secret of the gunpowder. He was so sure that the look in her eyes frightened him. It wasn't the expression of the child-like girl he had known. All the background and strife of a lost people were in her stare. He alone noticed the tenseness of her body. He alone realized that in her mind some plan was evolving.

The test tube tipped slowly in his finger and the flow of yellow liquid poured over the stone on the table.

Von Strom's lips parted eagerly and his tongue moistened them. The stone turned suddenly from a dull gray to brilliant, flashing yellow. It wasn't the yellow of dye, but the full, living sparkle of gold. Before it had cooled, he clutched it up and turned it over and over in his hand. It was solid, heavy with value.

His eyes shifted until they met Stern's, tense and waiting on the far side of the table.

"It is gold," he said. "I can do the same now. Your task is finished."

He backed slowly toward the door. The stone was clutched tightly in one hand, his pistol in the other. The Nazis stood close together, ready for the last act.

Mary and Ann Masters were drawn slowly toward Stern. Archer, his face flaming red, drew away from the Nazi group. Ready for the kill, they did not protest. The room was divided now. Stern's eyes never left the yellow stone in Von Strom's hand. His face relaxed slowly, and a smile came over his face.

"You are a clever man, Hans," he said slowly. "Look at your gold."

Von Strom glanced quickly at the thing in his hands. Its color was already gone. With darkening features, he watched what had been gold turn to dusty black rock between his fingers. The look of anger that spread across his face, mirrored itself on the faces of

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his friends.

"You fool," he shouted. "You damned American fool. Do you think you can get away with this?"

With all his strength, he threw the black object straight at Stern's head.

STERN tried to dodge, felt the heavy fragment strike the side of his head, and went to his knees. He tried to arise but the blow had been well placed. He sank to the floor, pain blinding him.

He knew that the room was suddenly alive with action. Von Strom was swearing loudly and Stern heard the sudden loud explosion of a gun shot. He staggered to his feet, fell forward across the table as Ann Masters rushed toward the Nazis at the door. In her right hand she held the flaming burner that Stern had used a short time before. In her left . . .

Jeff Stern made one, great effort to push the table away from him. Ann was before Von Strom now, and between them she seemed to be fumbling with something that he tried to grasp from her.

"No you don't—Fraulein . . ."

A terrific explosion shook the walls, and the table tipped backward on top of Stern. Mary Steele's scream of horror rose above the dying sound and Stern knew that the room had been torn apart with the force that had killed the Nazis.

For a long time he knew no more. Yet, in his unconscious mind, the face of Ann Masters turned like a lovely pinwheel. Her voice in his ear, the softness of her lips on his cheek. Over and over he heard her whisper.

"Believe from the start that I would do you no harm . . ."

FROM the clean, white bed at Mercy Hospital, Jeff Stern could once more take a long range view of what had happened. Somehow he was glad. After they told him what had happened, Mary Steele and gruff, good natured Joe Archer had left him alone with his thoughts.

From the first, he had loved Ann. If, across the ages, they were to meet again, he knew she would remember. That look in her eyes when he had watched her from his place by the table. The way she had grasped the solid gunpowder, and shielding them with her own body, touched the flame that had blown Von Strom and his men from existence. Ann Masters had known the secret of Bacon's "fool's gold." She had used it to save Jeff Stern, at the cost of her own life.

Others, Stern thought grimly, would also learn the horrible powder that had destroyed Ann. Even now, great armadas of American bombers were winging their way high in the sky above Berlin. Every city in Germany would awaken amidst chaos, to find the world of the swastika torn asunder with bombs that were five times more powerful than their worst dreams had imagined.

But for the bravery of one girl, the tables would be reversed. The spirit of Ann Masters, although unknown, would be flying with those men on their mission of death over Germany.

Stern closed his eyes, and felt the soft air from the open window.

His lips parted in a contented smile.

"Believe from the start that I mean you no harm—strange things may happen—I am always at your side—trying to help."

THE END

FOR THE BEST IN SCIENCE FICTION—AMAZING STORIES

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THE MIRACLE OF KICKER McQUIRE

BY ROBERT MOORE WILLIAMS

ELMER aimed his pistol at the enemy in the fort.

"Bang!" he yelled. "Bang! Bang! Bang! You're all dead!"

The enemy denied that this was true. "You missed us," the enemy yelled. "You never hit anybody. You can't shoot straight. You're a bum shot."

Yelling, the enemy came out of the fort and advanced in a counterattack. Elmer was outnumbered. He retreated across the street.

The enemy deployed in a skirmish line and advanced upon him. There were eight of them, every one a commando. They had a variety of weapons.

Skinny Higgins had a sub-machine gun. "It went brrrr—brrrr—brrrr—" at the top of his voice.

Pinky Ranson had a portable cannon. It went "Boom! Boom! Boom!" as loud as Pinky could yell.

Red Halsey was, all in himself, a tank destroyer. In consequence he was armed with two weapons, a cannon and a heavy machine gun, which went, "Boom!—Brrrr!—Boom!—Brrr!" as loud as Red's rather squeaky voice permitted him to scream.

The other commandos were armed with various weapons.

All the weapons were being used at the same time.

The cannonading was terrific.

Elmer fought bravely. He would not retreat, not as long as his vocal cords held out. He had a fine set of vocal cords. He was so busy fighting at the top of his voice that he did not see the wolf-faced man coming down the street, until the man yelled:

"Stop that infernal noise!"

Elmer looked up. "Gee whiz!" he said. "It's Mr. Corkle!"

Elmer knew the man. Several months previously, Mr. Corkle had rented a room from Mrs. Monger, who ran a boarding-house down the street. Since that time he had been occasionally observed walking about the neighborhood. Several times certain bad boys had chucked rotten apples at him and had called him names like "Old Funny-face," and "Old Skin-and-bones."

After Mr. Corkle tinkered with the toy gun little Elmer returned to battle; and this time he won easily—and terribly

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"Bang, bang. You're dead!" shouted Little Elmer

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The names were not inappropriate. Mr. Corkle had a face like a wolf and his body was nothing but skin and bones. But despite the fact that the names fitted him, he had resented them. He had chased the boys until he was out of breath and then he had shaken his fist after them.

He now appeared to be resenting the battle sounds.

"Stop that cursed screeching!" he shouted.

Elmer stopped. The enemy did not stop. They continued to advance, with tank destroyers, dive bombers, light and heavy artillery, and machine guns, vigorously in action.

"I said to stop that noise!" Corkle shouted. "You blasted little fools! It is enough to drive a man to insanity."

THIS time the enemy hesitated. There was a moment of silence. Then Red Halsey, he of the tank destroyer, who had captained the rotten apple brigade in one of the previous encounters, said,

"Yah! Old Funny Face! Why should we stop for you? Boom!—Brrrr!—Boom!—"

The battle cry was instantly taken up by other voices.

"Old Skin-and-bones wants us to stop. We won't do it. Brrrr!—Brrr!—Brrr!"

Mr. Corkle looked as if he was going to have a fit. For a moment Elmer thought the man was going to tear his hair and foam at the mouth. "Stop it! Stop it! Stop it!" he screamed.

The enemy continued to advance. Probably the commandos would have swarmed over Elmer and Mr. Corkle if, at that moment, the brave soldiers whom Elmer captained had not appeared on the scene. They had been lurking in hiding, waiting for the moment to strike the enemy in the flank and demoralize him.

They struck. The commandos were demoralized. They hastily retired to their fort on the vacant lot across the street.

Elmer and Mr. Corkle were left alone.

"Little savages!" Mr. Corkle muttered. "Little beasts! They ought to be—" His eyes lighted on Elmer's pistol.

The pistol was the reason Elmer was the captain of one of the armies. No other kid in the neighborhood had a pistol like this. It had a great ringed barrel of bronze, and fancy sights. Elmer had sent an extortionate number of box tops to a cereal company for it.

"Let me see that thing," Mr. Corkle demanded.

Elmer demurred. He was afraid Mr. Corkle might smash it.

"Look at me, kid!" the man said.

Elmer looked at him. Mr. Corkle not only had a face like a wolf, he had eyes that somehow made you obey him. Elmer limply handed him the toy pistol.

Mr. Corkle examined it. "Hm," he said. And then again. "Hm!" He looked down the muzzle and pried into the handle. Then, before Elmer could protest, he took a small tool kit from his pocket. Muttering to himself, he worked rapidly with the pistol for several minutes.

In the fort across the street, Elmer could hear the enemy howling defiance.

"Get them, kid!" Mr. Corkle said, suddenly handing Elmer the pistol.

Elmer took it. He charged across the street. His soldiers made room for him, their captain. He pointed his pistol at the fort.

"Bang! Bang!" he yelled at the top of his voice. "Bang! Bang! Bang! You're all dead." Aiming at the fort, he pressed the trigger of the pistol. A tiny puff of blue light came out of the

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muzzle.

"Bang! Bang! You're all dead!" Elmer repeated.

The enemy, crouched within the shelter of the fort, did not deny this. Elmer thought their silence was very strange. He approached, peeped over the rampart.

Suddenly he screamed. The pistol dropped from his hand.

All of the commandos *were* dead!

Elmer's brave soldiers, after taking one look at the lifeless bodies stretched out inside the crude barricade of packing cases, joined their captain in fleeing.

Mr. Corkle observed the scene. Then, a satisfied smile on his wolfish face, he walked quietly down the street.

THIS was not the first time in history that a battle made the headlines. But this was probably the first time that a sham battle between kids fighting on a vacant lot in a poor section of town made banner headlines on every newspaper in the city.

EIGHT CHILDREN FOUND DEAD ON VACANT LOT

Cause of deaths unknown

Eight children were found dead on a vacant lot at 322 Quincy Street this afternoon. Physicians called to the scene have been unable to ascertain the cause of the deaths.

John Carson, storekeeper at 323 Quincy Street, said that the children had been playing war games all afternoon. They had constructed a play fort of packing boxes on a vacant lot and their activities centered around this.

Carson said he noticed the children had suddenly stopped their play. He thought nothing of this until he went to the back of his store to obtain a packing box, which he was unable to find, although he knew several boxes had been there this morning. Then he realized the children had taken the boxes from his store and had used them in constructing their fort. Going across the street to the vacant lot to recover the boxes, he discovered the bodies of the eight children, and called police to the scene.

Police officers are making a thorough search of the whole neighborhood in an effort to ascertain the cause of this tragedy. They admit they have as yet uncovered no clue that promises to lead to the solution of the mystery.

"Nothing like this has ever come up in the history of the police department," Captain Hannegan, who is in charge of the investigation, said. "You may be certain that every effort will be made to determine the cause of this horrible accident and to prevent it happening again."

Then followed the names of the victims, their pictures, pictures of the fort on the vacant lot, pictures of the neighborhood, pictures of Carson, the grocer, pictures of the moms and dads. It was a good story and the newspapers played it for all it was worth. It was first broken in the late editions of the afternoon papers.

Kicker McGuire worked on a morning paper. Consequently he was off duty when the story broke. The first thing he knew about it was when he read it, between sips at a stein of beer, in the edition of a rival sheet.

"Holy mackerel!" he gulped. "Eight kids dead!"

By the time he had finished reading the story, he was no longer off duty. True, he was not required to report to work for a couple of hours as yet, but that didn't make any difference to him. Any time a story broke, he was automatically on duty. He headed for 322 Quincy Street without even waiting to pay for his beer.

Kicker McGuire came by his name honestly. He kicked about everything. If it was raining, he kicked about the weather. If the sun was shining, he kicked about the heat. If he discovered that the mayor had a financial interest in the contracting firm that seemed to be getting most of the paving contracts, he kicked about that, kicked vehemently. If a police captain in the red-light district was detected in the act of banking more than his salary, McGuire

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kicked about that, too. In consequence of all this, he was not loved in many places, but he was respected everywhere.

There were only four places in town where he was not respected—the recruiting stations of the army, the navy, the air force and the marines. Protesting vociferously, he had been flung bodily out of all of them. The doctors were well within their rights in ejecting him. They pointed out that he was threatened with stomach ulcers as a result of drinking too much bad whiskey, and that he had weak lungs as a result of smoking too many cigarettes. He had another defect that none of their instruments had been able to detect—his heart was too big for his skinny body. But maybe that wasn't a defect. It made him a champion of lost causes, of forlorn battles, of dim hopes. It made him what he was—Kicker McGuire.

"If a leakage of gas from some busted sewer that the department of streets and sewers didn't have the money to repair because all the dough has gone into grafting contracts, caused those kids to keel over and die, there is going to be hell to pay in this town!" Kicker muttered to himself, as his cab rattled toward 322 Quincy Street. He thought maybe sewer gas leakage had caused the deaths. He didn't know it had happened, or if it could happen that way. But if it had—

ARRIVING at the scene, he found Captain Hannegan in charge.

"Who th' hell sent you?" Captain Hannegan greeted the reporter.

"What do you care?" Kicker retorted. "I came down here to clean up this mess."

"You did, did you? Beat it."

"Like hell I'll beat it. I'm a reporter. I've got a right here. And furthermore, Captain Hannegan, if you want to strain your eyes reading the fine print back in the classified ads section, just try to keep me out of here."

The reporter had been kicked around by the police department before. He knew how to handle such situations.

Hannegan fell for the trap. "And why," he demanded, "will I be readin' the fine print back among the ads if I don't let you stick your nasty nose in here?"

"That," said Kicker McGuire, "is where you will find your name printed in the future. If," he ended, "you find it printed at all."

Hannegan liked to see his picture in the paper. He liked to read about Captain Hannegan doing this and doing that. "All right," he shouted, shaking his finger at the reporter, "but if I had my way, you stinkin' newspaper rats—"

"I know. You'd have us drowned as soon as we're born. Never mind that. Where is this fort?"

Hannegan gestured toward the vacant lot. A line of cops were keeping the curious from the scene. Kicker invaded the lot. He needed only a moment to make certain that a leakage of sewer gas had not caused the death of the children. Then what had caused it? There was nothing about the fort that was unusual, the lot was a perfectly ordinary vacant space. Eight children had died here.

"Where are the bodies?" Kicker asked.

"At the morgue," Hannegan grumpily told him.

Kicker went to the morgue. It was a gray, gloomy building. Inside it was always cold with a clamminess that no amount of heat could dissipate. Kicker had been here hundreds of times. He always hated it. Automatically he turned up his coat collar before entering.

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Inside, the first thing he heard was a low, muffled sound. He knew what it was. Somewhere in this gray, gloomy building a mother was crying.

Kicker did not enter the room where the bodies lay. He couldn't go in there. Instead he summoned a harried medical examiner to him.

"What caused it, Doc?"

"Kicker, I don't know. I just don't know. There isn't a mark that I can find on their bodies. They look like—they look as if something had sucked the life out of them." The words came rapidly.

THE doctor was an old, white-haired man with a kindly, gentle face. He looked scared.

Kicker swallowed. "You performed autopsies yet, Doc?"

"No," the doctor said hastily. "I haven't—I couldn't—I thought it could wait until tomorrow."

Kicker left the morgue. Outside, in the gathering spring dusk, he turned his coat collar down again. He went back to 322 Quincy Street.

"You found out anything yet?" he asked Hannegan.

The captain's manner had changed. He was no longer brusque and forbidding. Sometime in the past hour he had remembered he had a couple of kids himself. "I haven't got a thing," he said. He sounded tired.

"What are you doing?"

"I've got men out combing the neighborhood, going to every house, asking questions. We'll get something, I hope. The hell of it is, there isn't a thing to go on. If it was an accident, how did it happen? If it wasn't an accident—" Hannegan mumbled to himself. "But no one would go around killing kids," he ended, shaking his head.

"The kids are dead," Kicker said.

"I know they are," the cop said dully. "If we could only ask them what happened— Hey! Where are you going now?"

Kicker didn't answer. Hannegan had given him an idea. He knew enough about police procedure to know that the cops going around the neighborhood would ask questions of adults. The adults wouldn't know anything.

Somebody ought to question the kids.

There was a chance the kids might know something.

Kicker was going to question the youngsters!

HE TALKED to a lot of children. "Elmer did it," a scared little tyke told him. "I didn't do it, mister. It was Elmer."

"And where would I find Elmer?"

Blubbering, the tyke told him.

Kicker knocked on the door at the address that had been given him. It was a tenement, a greasy four-flat. A green blind was pulled down over the window on the first floor at the left. There was no answer.

He knocked again.

There was a dim bulb burning over the entrance and by the light this provided, he saw the window shade move. Somebody on the inside was watching him. He waited. The voice of a startled child squeaked. "It ain't the cops! It's just a man."

Kicker grinned. "Come on out," he said.

The door was opened a crack. A pair of eyes regarded him suspiciously. "What do you want?" a voice said. It was the voice of a kid.

"I want to talk to Elmer."

The eyes studied him. "You're not a cop?" the voice questioned.

"No, sir!" Kicker said firmly. "Now if you will only send Elmer out—"

The door opened wider. "I'm Elmer," the voice said. Elmer stood in

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the door. Two smaller editions, one a girl, the other a boy, peeped curiously around Elmer at the visitor.

"Where are your folks?"

"Mom's at work," Elmer said. "I don't know where pop is."

Kicker imagined how hard it would be for a cop to talk to Elmer. Just a glimpse of a blue coat at the door and there was nobody home here. The mother at work, the father out, the kids hiding.

"Come out on the steps and sit down," the reporter invited.

Elmer came out but he didn't sit down. "Who are you?" he asked.

Kicker grinned. "I'm a reporter," he said.

The statement made an impression on Elmer. He had heard of reporters. "Gee, mister, you mean you work for a newspaper?"

"Yes. I talk to people and then I write stories about them. How would you like me to put a story about you in the paper?"

Elmer hesitated. His name in the paper would give him prestige. He had never heard of the word prestige, but he knew the boys in his gang would look up to him, if he had his name in the paper. It would make him a pretty important guy. However, there were other matters to be taken into consideration.

Kicker saw the hesitation. "How would you like a buck for yourself?" he said, reaching into his pocket and pulling out a dollar bill. It was a new bill. It made a pleasant crinkling noise when he wrinkled it.

Elmer's eyes widened. He had never owned a whole dollar in his life. "For me?" he whispered. He snatched at the dollar. For an instant, his face a round moon of delight, he stared at it. Then it went out of sight in his pocket. "What do you want me to do, mister?"

"I want you to tell me what happened at the fort this afternoon," Kicker said.

ELMER'S hesitation vanished instantly. Like a frightened rabbit, he dived for the doorway.

Kicker caught him by the leg. "Wait a minute, Elmer. I'm not going to hurt you. All I want is to talk to you."

"You'll tell the cops."

"I won't tell the cops anything," Kicker emphatically protested. He was discovering that holding a wiry, well-built boy was anything but easy. Elmer kicked and scratched. He yowled to be let go. Only after Kicker vehemently protested that he was a reporter, not a policeman, that he had no intention of telling anything to any cop that ever lived, was Elmer willing to cease physical resistance. But even then he didn't want to talk. Kicker had to part with another dollar.

"I didn't kill 'em," Elmer said suddenly.

"I know you didn't," Kicker said. "But what did happen? Was it an accident, or what?"

"I don't know," Elmer said reluctantly. "I pointed my gun at them. Then they were all dead."

"You pointed your gun at them!" the shocked reporter gasped. Then, as Elmer again showed signs of wanting to run, he swiftly changed the tone of his voice. "What kind of a gun was it?"

"Just a gun," Elmer said.

"Was it a pistol or a rifle?" Kicker remembered what the medical examiner had told him—there was no wound on the bodies. A bullet would certainly leave a mark behind it.

"A pistol," Elmer said.

"Where did you get it?"

"I sent in box tops and got it," Elmer answered.

"You sent in box tops!" Kicker al-

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most choked. Here was something new in his experience. He had talked to many a killer who had used a gun or a knife but he had never before interviewed a youngster who had used a pistol obtained from box tops to kill eight of his companions. He knew, however, that Elmer wasn't a killer. He hadn't intended to kill those kids. Then what had happened?

"I don't know, mister," Elmer pled. "I just pointed my gun at 'em and pulled the trigger. A kind of blue light came out the muzzle. When I looked in the fort, they were all dead."

He went on to explain the game they had been playing. Kicker got a clear picture of the situation. A bunch of kids had been playing war. Something had gone wrong. A toy pistol had suddenly puffed blue flame. Something had *really* gone wrong.

"Where is this gun now?" the reporter asked.

"I dropped it in front of the fort," Elmer said doubtfully. "At least I think I dropped it there."

"I'm going to find that pistol," Kicker said. "You come along, to identify it for me."

ELMER didn't want to go along. He had to stay with the kids, he said. For another dollar, he put the kids to bed and went with the reporter.

A crowd was still at the scene. Elmer stayed back out of sight while the reporter went out into the middle of the lot. The police had searched this place, once, but they had been looking for deadly weapons, not for toy pistols.

Kicker found the gun. He picked it up. The feel of the toy in his hands gave him a cold chill. Was it possible that this thing had killed eight children?

As far as he could tell without taking it apart, it was nothing but a toy pistol, and a cheap one at that. He pointed it at the ground, started to pull the trigger.

"Suppose it works!" he thought.

He hastily put the gun in his pocket without pulling the trigger. What if he tried it, and a blue flame leaped from the muzzle? What then?

He didn't know what then.

He exhibited the gun to Elmer.

"That's it," Elmer said. "Mister, I've been thinking about something." There was a hesitant note in his voice as though he had thought of something and was wondering whether or not he ought to tell.

"Yes?" Kicker encouraged him.

"I was playing with the pistol all afternoon, pointing it at kids and pulling the trigger, and nothing ever happened. But just before I pulled the trigger the last time—"

Kicker McGuire felt an icy chill run up his spine. "Yes, Elmer," he said. "What happened just before you pulled the trigger the last time?"

"Old Skin-and-bones Corkle came along."

"What?" Kicker gasped.

"He's a man who lives near here. Old Skin-and-bones is what we call him," Elmer explained.

In spite of himself, the reporter laughed. Kids thought up the damnedest names. "What about Old Skin-and-bones?" he asked.

"He was mad at us, because we were making a lot of noise," Elmer said. "He took my pistol away from me and he did something to it. The next time I used it was when—when—"

"Go on!" the reporter said harshly. The cold feeling on his spine was growing colder.

"Was when I pointed it at the fort," Elmer gulped. "The next time I pulled the trigger, the blue flame came out of it."

"The next time—" Kicker choked.

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He got a mental picture of a man the kids would call Old Skin-and-bones being annoyed at the noise children make at play. Skin-and-bones wanted them to stop. They wouldn't stop. He borrowed a pistol from one of them, a toy pistol, did something to it. The next time the pistol was used, the noise the kids were making stopped.

"It's impossible," the reporter groaned. "It just can't be. Nobody could be that mean."

He meant that no human being would kill a bunch of kids just because their noise was bothering him. It was fiendish. It was incredible. Even Kicker McGuire, with his extensive knowledge of human depravity, did not believe that such a thing could happen. But —eight kids were dead.

What had been done to that pistol?

"Where," Kicker said huskily. "Where would I find Old Skin-and-bones Corkle?"

"He lives in Mrs. Monger's rooming-house," Elmer said. "I'll show you where it is."

THE rooming-house was a shabby brick building, of three stories. A faded sign proclaimed ROOMS TO RENT—BY DAY OR WEEK.

"You wait outside," Kicker told Elmer. He rang the bell.

Mrs. Monger opened the door. "Would you be looking for a room? I have a nice room on the first floor—"

"To be frank, I'm not looking for a room right now. I'm a reporter, investigating the terrible accident that happened near here today. I'm checking the whole neighborhood and I was wondering if you—or any of your tenants—could tell me anything about it. I hoped you might be able to give me something I could print in the paper."

Mrs. Monger fluttered. The police had been here. She had not received them with much grace. But a reporter now— She hastily rearranged her hair. "Do come in. I'm looking a sight but I hope you will excuse me. Do come in. Please do."

Kicker entered.

Mrs. Monger was a gusher. "Oh, that terrible accident. I was telling John not over an hour ago—John is Mr. Monger—that I knew every one of those children. And to think they're all dead, every one of them. When things like that can happen, I just don't see what the world is coming to."

She would have gone on talking forever. It was immediately obvious that she knew nothing of any importance. The reporter had not expected her to know anything. He didn't want to talk to her. He wanted to talk to one of her roomers, to a man named Corkle. He also wanted an excuse for talking to Corkle. He had a hunch he might need an excuse, a good one. *Somewhere in this house was a man who could turn a toy pistol into an engine of destruction more deadly than any weapon ever invented by the human race.*

"Very interesting," Kicker said, making copious notes on what Mrs. Monger had told him—which he did not intend to use—. "Very interesting indeed. You have helped my story a lot. Now I wonder—possibly some of your tenants might be able to add something to what you have told me—"

"I don't know what they could add!" Mrs. Monger sniffed.

"One never knows until one asks," Kicker said piously. "Would you mind taking me around and introducing me to them?"

MRS. MONGER took him upstairs. He talked to a skinny old maid, who tittered because she was talking to a man, he interviewed a down-at-the-

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heels bookkeeper, and a factory worker.

"Are these all your tenants?" he asked, when the last interview was over.

"All except one."

"Ah!"

"You don't want to talk to him. All he'd give you would be a short answer. I was telling my husband only tonight, 'John, we simply have to ask that Mr. Corkle to vacate, even if he does pay his rent promptly. I just don't want him around the house. He gives me a creepy feeling every time I see him.' That's what I told my husband no longer ago than an hour."

Corkle! Kicker noticed that his palms had suddenly become sticky.

"While I'm here, I might as well talk to him," he said. "Which is his room?"

"It's on the first floor. I'll take you to it. But if he snaps your head off, don't blame me."

Corkle himself opened the door. Mrs. Monger promptly went back to the kitchen. As soon as he got a glimpse of the man, Kicker recognized Elmer's description—Old Skin-and-bones. Hot burning eyes in the face of a wolf. A tall, drooping, emaciated frame.

"What do you want?" Corkle snapped.

He spoke each word separately, in an unaccented monotone. There was something foreign about the tone of his voice and the care with which he chose the words he wanted to use. They were good English words, but as he spoke each one, he seemed to reach back into his memory and choose from his stock of sounds the exact word he wanted to use.

Kicker explained his mission. "I'm talking to all the people in the neighborhood, trying to discover something about the terrible accident that happened this afternoon. I was wondering if you could tell me anything about it."

"I know nothing."

"There is a possibility that you know something and don't realize it," Kicker persisted.

"I tell you I know nothing."

"But you almost have to know *something*. And if you can tell me anything, you will get your name and your picture in the paper."

With everyone else, this promise had worked. It didn't work with Corkle.

"I want no publicity."

"But—"

"Get out!"

Corkle started to close the door.

"Just a second," the reporter objected. There still remained a trump card he could play but he didn't want to play this card if he could help it. However, he certainly wanted to talk to Corkle, to get into the man's room, if possible, and look around.

Corkle held the door open a crack.

"Well, what is it?"

Kicker realized the man was not going to listen long. He knew he had to play his trump. He pulled the toy pistol out of his pocket.

"I found this on the vacant lot where the children were killed," he said. "I was wondering if you could tell me anything about it."

CORKLE'S glittering eyes fastened on the pistol. For a second the toy held his gaze. Then he looked up, at the reporter, and the gaze became an intent, measuring tool. Kicker had the impression that in the split second that had passed, Corkle had examined him as a scientist would examine a bug under the microscope.

Corkle opened the door.

"Come in," he said.

Kicker's heart jumped. He had played his trump and it had worked. He entered the room. Now he would have a chance to look around.

With one exception, it was an ordi-

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nary room, cheaply furnished, but larger than the average room in a boarding-house. This exception was a large piece of machinery sitting on the floor near the farther wall. The machine looked like a dynamo and a radio transmitter combined into a single unit. Why anyone would want to combine a radio transmitter and a dynamo, Kicker did not know, but Corkle, for some reason of his own, had done it. There was a workbench littered with delicate tools on one side of the room. Corkle had apparently been working on the machine.

It was running. The dynamo was turning over very slowly. Somehow just looking at those slowly turning coils hurt the eyes. They seemed to give a wrench to the vision, to twist it into another dimension. Kicker glanced at the machine. A jolt of pain tore through his head. He jerked his eyes away.

Corkle was holding out his hand.

"Give me that pistol," he said.

Kicker held on to the gun. The suddenness of the demand surprised him. He had used the gun as a trump card to get into this room. It had got him in here. Very suddenly he wondered what he would need to get out again.

"I was just curious about this pistol," he said. "As I told you, I found it near the fort where the children had been playing. I've been showing it to everyone in the neighborhood, hoping that someone would recognize it."

"Stop stalling!" Like twin shots striking the target, the two words struck.

"I don't know what you mean," Kicker said hastily. "I'm just trying to identify this toy pistol. That's all. I'm trying to identify it. I thought it might have some bearing—"

The wolf face hardened. Fire gleamed in the dark eyes.

"Give me that gun!"

KICKER McGUIRE swallowed. Corkle knew he was stalling. Kicker knew he was caught. He knew he had forced his way into one room too many.

"All right," he said huskily. "I'll give it to you. But if you move, I'll pull the trigger."

He covered Corkle with the toy pistol. If it was only a toy pistol, Corkle would not be afraid of it. If it was something more! He watched the man.

Corkle recoiled.

"You fool!" the wolf lips said.

"Don't move," Kicker said. He knew he had to get out of here. He had run into something bigger than he expected and he had to get away.

Corkle didn't move. He looked like a hovering buzzard about to swoop.

"Look at me," he said.

Kicker McGuire was fumbling for the doorknob. He didn't dare turn his back. Sensing the threat in the man's voice, he tried to turn his eyes away.

"Look at me!" Corkle repeated. There was a commanding note in his voice. In spite of himself Kicker looked at him.

Corkle had eyes that glittered like candle flames in darkness.

"Give me that gun," he said.

There was a hypnotic quality in the eyes. They forbade resistance. They commanded resistance. Kicker tried to fight them. The harder he tried to fight, the more the eyes commanded. Without orders from him, his hand went out. Corkle took the gun from resistless fingers.

Not taking his eyes off the reporter, Corkle backed to the workbench, picked up a small tool. Working with almost incredible deftness, he took the toy pistol apart. From the muzzle he removed a tiny glass tube, a length of silver wire.

Kicker started forward.

"Stand still!" Corkle said.

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The reporter froze. He was trying to move. Sweat was popping out all over him from the magnitude of his effort. He could not force his muscles to obey his will. He knew he was being hypnotized, he tried to fight the hypnosis. He had read that no one could be hypnotized against his will. Corkle had done it. Corkle seemed to know more about hypnosis than was written in the books.

He seemed to know more about toy pistols than the manufacturers.

WORKING with great care, he did something to the glass tube he had removed from the muzzle of the gun. Then, as though its fangs had been drawn, he tossed it carelessly on the workbench. It broke with a little *plop,* flamed with intolerable brilliance for a second. When the flame died down, fused bits of glass were all that was left.

Corkle laughed.

"You—you—"

"Not that it mattered what you did," Corkle said. "I won't be here long enough for anything you could do to matter. But, on the other hand, if you took that pistol to them, you might force your sluggish police to move fast enough to cause me trouble. So—I destroyed the evidence. Without evidence, your police cannot act."

"I don't understand you," Kicker said huskily. He was lying. He understood too well.

"You understand all right," Corkle said. "You were lucky enough to stumble on that pistol, after I had changed it. But you weren't sure about it, so you brought it here to me. You hoped I would betray myself when I saw it. You came prying around hoping you would find out something about me."

"I did find something," Kicker said. "I found out you killed those kids. You murdered them."

"The little devils were making too much noise. Certainly, I destroyed them. Many times they have made me the butt of their jokes, me, the—" He stopped speaking.

"W-who are you?" Kicker said.

"Wouldn't you like to know!" Corkle laughed. Laughing, he looked more like a wolf than ever.

The laugh infuriated the reporter. "You dirty rat. You'll never get away with this—"

Corkle stopped laughing. He seemed to realize that, even without the evidence of the toy pistol, this reporter might still be dangerous. Flame glittered in his eyes.

"Why can't I keep my big mouth shut?" Kicker moaned to himself. He had said too much, and he knew it. He dived for the door.

If he could get out of here, call the cops—Captain Hannegan would probably call him a rattle-brained dope fiend, but Hannegan, no matter what his opinion of Kicker McGuire, would investigate. He was a good cop. Once he got his teeth in, he would hold on like a bulldog. If Kicker could get to him—

"Stop!" Corkle said. He did not speak loudly but in his voice was the same compelling quality that had been there when he demanded the toy pistol be given to him.

Kicker had grabbed the doorknob. Too late he realized that the strange hypnotic quality was as much in the tones of Corkle's voice as in the glitter of his eyes.

He could not open the door.

"Hah!" Corkle gloated.

Whiz!

Thump!

Corkle grunted.

Kicker felt the hypnosis relax. He turned just in time to see half a brick hit the floor. It had previously bounced off Corkle's head. The thump had come

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from the brick striking Corkle.

THE window was open. The frightened face of Elmer was peering through it. He had one leg over the window sill and was coming into the room. Elmer had been watching through the window. Kicker had given him three bucks. Kicker was his friend. He was coming to help.

Corkle, a dazed look on his face, was feeling the lump on his head where the brick had struck.

In a half second he had another lump to feel. This one was on his jaw, where Kicker hit him. The reporter swung from the floor. He put all the strength of his skinny frame into the blow. He expected it to knock Corkle cuckoo.

It didn't. Corkle staggered backward. He caught himself on the workbench. For a split second, he glared at Kicker and Elmer, as though he was wondering what had happened. He didn't have time to wonder long. Elmer dived at his legs. Kicker grabbed at him higher up.

Corkle saw them coming. His fingers danced among the tools on the bench. He picked up something that looked like a flashlight, pointed it at the two. A jet of smoke puffed out of it.

THE next thing Kicker knew, he was sitting on the floor. Elmer was sitting beside him. Elmer was rubbing his eyes. Kicker rubbed his own eyes. He could barely see.

He could see well enough to distinguish Corkle. Bent almost double with silent laughter, the man was leaning against the workbench.

"How did you like that gas?" Corkle was saying. "Good stuff, isn't it? I kept the gas gun here, to have it handy if I ever needed it. Another whiff of that stuff and you two would have been dead monkeys."

He paused, seemed to think. "I do not speak your language very well," he said with seeming irrelevancy. "I am not always precise. What I meant to say was—another whiff of that gas and you two *will be* dead monkeys."

"He's—he's gonna kill us," Elmer whimpered.

"No, he isn't," Kicker said. "He's just bluffing. He won't dare kill us." In his heart, Kicker knew that he was the one who was doing the bluffing. He was trying to bluff Elmer into believing Corkle was not going to use that gas gun again. "You were a brave kid to throw that brick and try to help me—"

His head was going round and round. The gas had left a fog in his mind. But fog or no fog, he could see that this was it. Here was where they wrote 30 after the name of Kicker McGuire. Corkle would not let them get away. They knew too much.

He could see Corkle standing in front of them, silently laughing. His face was split with a wolfish grin. Behind Corkle, Kicker could see the strange machine, its eye-straining coils turning slowly and silently. A series of wires ran from the machine to a heavy metal plate on the floor. Kicker noticed the wires. He thought of a drowning man seeing straws on the surface of the water. Suddenly he blinked.

Beside the slowly turning machine, a man was standing! He seemed to puff out of existence, to come from nowhere. One second, he wasn't there. A blink of the eyes—there he was.

He was an old man, with a great shock of white hair, and a kindly, seamed face. He was watching Corkle in silence. Corkle did not know he was there.

Kicker shut his eyes. He was hallucinating, he told himself. He was seeing a ghost. There couldn't be a man standing beside the machine. There

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couldn't be! He opened his eyes to look again.

The man was still there! He was dressed in a short robe, that, like Jacob's cloak, was a coat of many colors. He had changed. The kindly look had gone from his face. He looked sad and sorrowful. He reached inside his robe. His hand, when it came out from under the cloak, held an object that looked like a pistol made of crystal glass. He pointed the crystal pistol at Corkle.

Kicker could see him very clearly. He saw the man's lips move. He heard the words.

"Lay the gas gun on the bench," the man said.

HIS words were English, but they were slurred and softened and changed until they were almost unrecognizable. At least Kicker McGuire had difficulty in recognizing them. Corkle seemed to have no trouble.

Like a cat that has suddenly detected the presence of a hitherto unsuspected dog, Corkle whirled to face the man in the cloak of many colors. He was jerking up the gas gun as he turned.

The crystal pistol covered him.

"Lay the gun on the workbench," the man said.

For a split second, Corkle hesitated. He did not want to obey that order. He was thinking about refusing to obey it. The face of the strange man darkened.

"Do as I say," he said.

His voice was as sharp as the snap of a whip.

Very slowly, Corkle laid the gas gun on the bench.

Kicker McGuire, watching the scene with fascinated interest, took a deep breath. The conviction was slowly being forced home to him that the man in the coat of many colors was not a ghost. He was real! Impossible as it seemed, he was real! Kicker watched. He was seeing something that no reporter had ever seen before and he knew it. He watched.

The strange man looked at Corkle. Then he looked at the machine.

"So!" he said.

The single syllable was pungent with accusation. It seemed to say, "You dirty yellow dog! You prince of liars, you thief, you worse than a thief."

Before that single word, Corkle seemed to wilt. His wolf face went white as tallow. "I was only experimenting" he hastily said. "I have to have something to occupy my mind. I couldn't just be here. I had to do something—"

"You are lying!" Many Colors interrupted. "You planned to disobey us. You planned to return, secretly, without our knowledge, in defiance of our ruling. You built this—" He nodded toward the machine. "—so you could return."

"Not so," Corkle protested.

"What other use, except to return, could this machine have?" Many Colors demanded.

"I was only experimenting," Corkle repeated. "That was all. I swear it—" He looked as if he wanted to get down on the floor and crawl up to the strange man and lick his feet.

"You will get your desire," Many Colors said.

"No! No!" Corkle protested. "Not that! Anything else! I will destroy the machine. I will never make another one. I swear it."

KICKER McGUIRE had once heard a condemned criminal scream in that tone of voice. His screams did not move the judge any more than Corkle's appeals.

"Step on the floor plate," Many Colors said.

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Corkle's face had turned green. Beads of sweat glistened on his forehead. "They—they will be waiting for me," he whispered.

"Now that they know you are coming, the wardens will be waiting for you," Many Colors said. "Step on the floor plate." He gestured toward the metal plate on the floor.

Corkle did not move.

The fingers of the man in the cloak of many colors tightened around the trigger of the crystal pistol. "Do you choose to resist?" he asked quietly.

Corkle's shoulders sagged. In that minute, he seemed to age years. His eyes sought the eyes of Many Colors. He seemed to tense himself.

Kicker McGuire got the impression that a terrific struggle was taking place. It was a clash of wills, involving no action, but because the two contestants did not move, it was none the less violent. He knew what Corkle was doing. Corkle was trying to hypnotize Many Colors, as he had the reporter.

Corkle lost! The man in the coat of many colors knew how to fight hypnosis. Corkle tottered toward the metal plate on the floor, stepped upon it, stood there. The lights that had glittered in his eyes seemed to have gone out.

Many Colors moved to the machine, made an adjustment. The coils began to spin faster. Kicker looked at them, and jerked his eyes away, as the strange distortion of vision sent a jolt of pain through his optic nerves. He looked toward Corkle.

Corkle was disappearing. He went in a direction the eyes could not follow. He seemed to shrink, rapidly, in size, to blur into some dimensional infinity. He grew smaller, smaller, smaller, blurred, and was gone!

MANY COLORS shut off the machine. The spinning coils slowed down. Kicker McGuire got to his feet. Elmer pressed very close to him.

"W-what the hell is going on here?" Kicker said.

Many Colors smiled. The smile was gentle. All the fury was gone from his face. "You feel you are due an explanation?" he said.

"You're darned right I feel I am," Kicker said. "W-who are you? Where did you come from?"

The strange man had come out of nothingness. Corkle had gone into nothingness. The reporter's head ached from the effort of trying to understand what had happened.

"I came from the future," Many Colors said.

"T-the future?—"

"Yes. From the far future."

Kicker's mind was going round and round. Many Colors had said he came from the future. That meant time travel. He had read once about time travel, in a novel by H. G. Wells. Wells had written about somebody going into the future. Corkle, Many Colors had come from the future. Corkle—the future—a toy pistol. No wonder Corkle had been able to turn a toy pistol into a deadly weapon! He had the science of ten thousand years at his finger tips. No wonder he knew so much about hypnosis. And the slow way he had spoken, English slurred and blurred, but still English. The language would change —in the future.

Kicker swallowed. Even if Many Colors did come from the future, there were many things he did not understand.

"How—how did you happen to turn up when you did?"

Many Colors nodded toward the machine. "Our instruments detected radiations from this device," he explained. "We took a directional bearing on the radiations, discovered they came from

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this time. We knew we had sent Corkle here, and since we were getting these radiations from this time, we thought it likely that Corkle was responsible. The radiations, we suspected, meant that Corkle was building and testing a time machine. I came to investigate."

"Oh," Kicker said.

"Who—who was Corkle? What was he doing here?"

"He was a criminal," Many Colors said. He committed murder. For this, he was sentenced to death—"

"And he hid in time?" Kicker interposed.

"No," Many Colors said. "He was banished into time. We do not believe in inflicting the death sentence on a fellow creature. But Corkle must be punished. So we did the only thing we could do—we sent him back in time, as a punishment for his crime."

CORKLE was a criminal! In the far future, he had committed murder. He had been banished to the past.* He had been trying to return to his own time, trying to sneak back to the time that had cast him out. That was why he had built the machine.

The odd, impossible pieces of the puzzle fitted together! They made sense. They also made Kicker McGuire angry. The more he thought about it, the angrier he became.

"So you dump your criminals back on us!" he said.

Many Colors looked perturbed. He began to stammer. "Why—why—I—I hadn't thought of it in that light. It was a way to dispose of them."

He didn't know he was talking to Kicker McGuire. He thought he was talking to a barbarian of the distant past, a dull, slow-witted creature who was probably scared half to death even to speak to him.

Kicker was scared. He was angry too, angrier than he was frightened. And—his sense of justice was outraged.

"It's a way to dispose of them, is it?" the reporter said. "You dump them back on us. You get rid of them all right, but what about us? We've got enough crooks of our own without taking any from you?"

"It—it seemed to do no harm," Many Colors faltered.

"No harm!" Kicker choked. "We've got a morgue with eight dead kids in it, kids killed by the criminal you dumped back on us. That's how much harm it has done."

This was Kicker McGuire talking, the man who talked back to anybody, who kicked about everything.

Many Colors stared at him as though he did not believe his ears. "Corkle——Corkle killed eight children?" he whispered.

"You're damned right he killed them. And I want you to get this straight right now. We don't want any more of your criminals back here under any circumstances. Do you get it?"

Many Colors got it. He swallowed. "Y-yes," he said. "Where—where are these children?"

"In the morgue," Kicker said. "What the hell difference does it make where they are?"

"Take me to them," Many Colors said.

"Take you to them? What do you want to do—count 'em yourself?"

"Take me to this morgue!" Many Colors said. There was a note of command in his voice.

IT WAS a startled landlady who saw the three come out of her house, a reporter, a boy, and a man dressed in a

* England, centuries ago, sent condemned criminals to America, later to Australia, also to the Andaman Islands. Russia sent her criminals to Siberia. The men of the future sent them to the past.—Ed.

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coat of many colors. She didn't get over talking about it for many a day.

There were other people who did not get over talking about what happened for more than many a day. Outside the rooming-house, Elmer scooted for him. Kicker took Many Colors to the morgue. They entered that gray, gloomy, always-cold building. Kicker took Many Colors into the room where the bodies lay. Many Colors looked at them. His face was very sad.

"I am sorry," he said. "I am very sorry."

"Being sorry doesn't help," Kicker said.

"I know. Will you wait outside?"

The question was a command. Kicker obeyed. He herded the distracted medical examiner out of the room.

They waited in the hall outside. There were moms and dads out there in the hall, moms and dads who looked at the floor and said nothing. Kicker nervously smoked cigarette after cigarette and waited. He did not know what he was waiting for.

Suddenly, from beyond the closed door, came a sound.

"Boom! Brrrr! Boom! Brrr—"

"Brrrr—Brrrr—"

"Boom!"

There was a split second of silence. Then, from beyond the closed door, came frightened cries.

Kicker did not know who went through that door first. Possibly some dad beat him to it. Possibly the reporter went first. He never knew about that. He got through the door.

THE room seemed to be full of kids. They were frightened kids. Their last memory had been of playing in the fort. They had continued their play. Then they had realized they were on longer in the fort, but in some strange room, with a man in a coat of many colors working feverishly over them.

"They've come back to life!" somebody whispered. There was trembling awe in that voice, and a wonder that went beyond the understanding. There was a moment of silence. Then the moms and dads took charge.

The newspapers headlined it:

MIRACLE AT THE MORGUE

They told how the eight children had been brought back to life by a miracle. Then, being wise newspapers and knowing that miracles do not happen, they decided that the children had not been dead at all, but had only been stunned.

Whether it was a miracle or not did not matter to Kicker McGuire. He took one look at the kids, then walked straight to Many Colors.

"It will not happen again," Many Colors said. "We will send no more criminals back to this time, or to any other time. We will deal with them ourselves."

Kicker was looking at the moms and dads and the kids. There was a lump in his throat. He was scared. He was more scared than he had ever been in all his life. He wanted to run. He didn't intend to run. He faced Many Colors.

"Those kids were dead," he said.

"Yes. They were."

"They're alive now."

"That is also true," Many Colors said.

Kicker took a deep breath. "What did you do to them?" he demanded.

Many Colors did not answer. A thoughtful look on his face, he stood studying Kicker McGuire. He saw the shabby clothes of the reporter, the thin cheeks, the nervous fingers. He saw something else, too, the fire that was in Kicker, the burning fire, the heart that was too big for the skinny body. He saw the real Kicker, the champion of lost causes, the fighter of forlorn battles,

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the defender of dim hopes.

"It is you, and the likes of you, who have made me possible," he said. He beckoned to Kicker. "You come with me," he said.

AMAZINGLY, Kicker did not protest. They went out the door. Side by side, they walked down the street, went back to Mrs. Monger's rooming house, entered the room that Corkle had occupied. Mrs. Monger later said she heard a sound in the room like a dynamo running.

What happened after that, no one ever knew. Kicker did not tell. He was gone a month. No one saw him around town, no one knew what had become of him. His newspaper made frantic inquiries, posted a reward, hounded the police. He was a damned nuisance to them when he was around, but when he was gone, they wanted him back.

Then Kicker came back. No one saw him come. The sergeant of the marine recruiting office, opening up in the morning, discovered Kicker first in line at the door. He knew Kicker.

"Now, look," the sergeant said. "We've turned you down twice already. You think we haven't got anything to do except turn you down?"

"Third time's the charm," Kicker said.

"Charm, is it?" the sergeant demanded. "And what kind of a charm do you think it would take to fix up that bad stomach of yours, to patch up those lungs? I'm trying to be nice about this, but I want you to know—"

Kicker had been patient far longer than usual. He exploded now. He knew his rights as a citizen and he was prepared to exercise them. When the explosion was over the irritated sergeant took his application and passed him on to the doctors. The medicos would give him the bounce.

The doctors remembered him.

"Beat it," they said.

"You examine me," Kicker said.

Since he demanded it, they did it. It was only routine, they knew the result beforehand. They took chest plates. These they examined. There was a frantic conference among the doctors, a hurried comparison with plates previously taken. Kicker, watching, grinned.

"How do you like the bellows?" he demanded.

The doctors didn't know how they liked the bellows. They examined the stomach, looking for threatened ulcers. Again there was a frantic consultation.

"What—what's happened to you?" the amazed doctors asked, at last.

"Never mind what's happened to me," Kicker said. "How about those plates, huh? Do I pass, or don't I?"

"You pass," the doctors said.

Kicker grinned. He turned to the sergeant. "Sergeant," he said sternly. "You heard what the doctors said. I passed. Sergeant, do your duty."

* * *

He was duly enrolled in the marines. Today he is somewhere overseas. He is still living up to his name—by helping kick hell out of Hitler, or out of Tojo, or, if he gets the chance, out of both of them.

THE END.

COMING NEXT MONTH

"GENIE OF BAGDAD," by William P. McGivern

A fascinating story of Scheherazade—and an amazing theory concerning her!
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The FAMILY TREE of the ANIMAL KINGDOM

By T. BORR

HAVE you ever observed the multitude of animal life about you and wondered how certain members of the animal kingdom are related to other members of the animal kingdom? Have you ever wondered where man fits into this apparent confusion?

Let us look at the family tree of the animal kingdom. Let us examine the various divisions which the talented scientists have made use of, in order to find a proper place for the 1,000,000 forms of animal life that we know of. Let us describe the characteristic features that place a particular animal into a certain division. Let us start from the bottom of the tree and gradually make our way upward. In doing this we will find that we are also getting a thorough lesson in evolution.

The first great division of the animal kingdom (called phylum I) consists of the Protozoans. Let us get acquainted with this simplest of all phyla or main divisions. First let us ask the following question: "What characteristics must an animal possess in order to be placed in this particular phylum?" Well, the members of this phylum are mostly one celled; that means that instead of a body form composed of a multitude of cell units, each unit specialized and working for the benefit of the whole organism, we have an individualistic and unspecialized set-up. Here we find a complete organism in a one-celled form. This one cell capable of all the life processes that are carried out in the multi-cellular forms of life. This one cell can take in food, digest the food, excrete the waste material; this one cell can respond to changes in environment, can carry on a metabolism, can reproduce its kind.

This phylum has also been divided into four important classes; the division is mostly based upon the type of locomotion exhibited by the members of the phylum Protozoa. In one class the members move about by extended false feet; the amoeba is an example of this class. When one looks at an amoeba through the microscope, he never knows what shape he may find it in. The amoeba looks like a mass of transparent, semifluid, jelly-like substance within which may be seen dark solid granules floating about. If you watch an amoeba closely, you will see that it does not possess a definite form or shape. To move, it merely flows out a mass of this jelly-like fluid in the form of a false foot and flows the rest of its body in the direction of this foot. Another class does possess a definite shape and moves about by virtue of many small hair-like processes. Another class does not possess any form of locomotion in the adult form; this class reproduces by forming spores and is very parasitic in nature—living on the bodies of other members of the animal kingdom.

Let us leave the one-celled division and make a short climb up the animal tree. We now come to phylum II, a phylum in which the sponge finds himself. It is hard to conceive of the idea that the sponge you use for washing windows is really a living animal. Yet the sponges are the simplest of the many cell animals. They seem to represent the first important attempt of the single cells to join forces. The sponge is losely organized —for if a sponge be torn to fragments and these strained through closely woven silk fabric, we can separate the sponge into the individual cells that compose it. These cells are capable of an individual life, showing how unspecialized the living units of a sponge really are. The sponge does differ from most of the protozoan colonies in that a differentiation of tissue has occurred. We can distinguish in the sponge a protective external tissue, an internal nutritive tissue, and an intermediate tissue—composed of skeletal cells.

Phylum III represents a more highly developed and interesting portion of the animal tree. The members of this phylum, the Coelenteres, are simple aquatic animals. They have gone a long way from their ancestors, the colonial protozoan. Let me describe the body plan of a typical coelenterate. It usually resembles a double-walled cylinder. Each wall is composed of a single layer of specialized cells—the outer layer concerned with the defense of the body, the mobility of the body, and the reproduction of the organism. The inner layer of cells (entoderm) are concerned with the digestion and distribution of the food, which enters the hollow central cavity by virtue of a mouth. The Coelenterates have a unique method of defending themselves. Covering the body of a typical Coelenterate are nettle cells. These nettle cells possess a coiled thread which is controlled by a hair-like trigger. When an enemy approaches the Coelenterate, the trigger hair springs back and the long slender thread is shot out with a great force. This thread can penetrate the body of many large animals, and to make it an even more deadly weapon, is provided with a few drops of a paralyzing poison.

Phylum IV, the (ctenophora), are considered by some zoologists as a class of Coelenterates. This phylum has made some important advancements over the Coelenterates, advancements that cannot be neglected. For instance, while the Coelenterates had only two distinct cell layers separated

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by a jelly-like substance, the ctenophora have added a distinct middle layer of cells. The ctenophora have developed a method of aggregating the nerve cells in a manner to produce distinct centers of nervous control. They have also come closer to developing an identical right and left side than have the previous animals we considered.

The next phylum we find composed of flattened, worm-like animals, the Platyhelminthes. This phylum gives up the first simple brain. As far as circulation and digestion are concerned, we still find a common cavity serving both of these important functions. In the Platyhelminthes we at last find a condition where the right and left sides are identical. Regarding the middle body layer, we find that the Platyhelminthes have certainly put it to advantageous use. From it they have developed a good muscular system, a good reproductive system, and a first attempt to form a distinct system for eliminating the waste materials of the body.

Some of the most important advances can be found in a special type of flat marine worm. So important are these advances, that scientists have placed these marine worms in a distinct phylum of their own, the Nemertinea or Phylum VI. These marine worms are the first to free the digestive system from the circulatory system. Their digestive system is built upon the same plan that we find in use in the more highly developed animals. We have a continuous alimentary canal with two openings: the mouth for the intake of food, the anus for the expulsion of the waste products of digestion. We have a system of tubes in which circulate blood. This appearance of blood is probably the most important of all the advancements we have yet considered. Could you conceive of any large and highly complicated animals depending upon a branching body cavity to supply its most remote body cells with the food and nourishment it would need so that it could carry on the processes of life? It is impossible; the branching body cavity makes use of the slow process of diffusing its food to all parts of the body. This system may work out when there is only a thickness of two layers, but in a complicated system—as we find in the higher animals—we must make use of a rigid flowing blood stream, or not the cells further from the main part of the body will starve.

We now come to a fairly high level in this family tree—yes, we have come a long way since the simple one-celled Protozoans. However, at this level we note that there are two tremendous branches arising to the right and left of the main trunk of the animal tree. If we follow each main branch up to its uppermost point, we find that the left branch leads to the greatest of all the animals—namely man. We should also discover that the right branch leads to the highly developed insects.

Let us first follow the left branch upward—quickly climbing over the important advancements that lead to the phylum man finds himself in. Who would have thought that a phylum, of which the star fishes, sea cucumbers, sea urchins, and crinoids are typical examples, is the most likely relative of the chordates? Looking at a star fish, you note a five-armed heavily limestone plated creature, with a water vascular system and peculiar tube feet. You probably think the scientists silly to consider this brainless automaton as being the relative of man, when the highly developed and intelligent insects appear so much more closely related. When we examine the life cycle of the Echinoderms, we note that the Echinoderms have a larva stage very different from the adult form. It is because this free-swimming larva resembles the larva of animals we feel sure gave rise to the phylum in which man finds himself, that we place the Echinoderms on the left side of the tree.

The great phylum in which we find the fishes, the amphibia, the reptiles, the mammals, and the birds, is called the phylum chordata. In order to be placed in this phylum, an animal must have an elastic rod running lengthwise through the body above the alimentary canal. This animal, instead of the ventral solid nervecord found in other phyla, must possess a dorsal tubular nerve cord which is hollow. This animal must also possess openings in the region of the pharynx—called gill slits. "I don't see any openings near my neck," may be the logical question that comes to the reader's mind; "and yet didn't you say that I belonged to the phylum of chordates?" Yes, it may be true that we do not possess gill slits in our adult stage; however, just examine a young developing human embryo and you can note the beginning of gill slit formation. In some cases, the gill slits may even break through as in the case of the fishes. This all brings out one of the most important of all biological laws—the fact that in the development of an individual, this individual will attempt to pass through his entire history of development. He may form useless structures and take the most indirect path in his attempt to relate the history of development he has gone through.

With this all important concept in mind, let us now turn to a brief consideration of the right side of the animal tree. The right branch and the left branch have many things in common. For example, both have an alimentary canal, also a body cavity in which the vital organs move more freely.

If we follow the right branch upward, we soon find that it divides into two important branches, and that from one of these branches arise the highly developed insect. The phylum that branches and gives rise to the insect phylum has as its representative member the earthworms. The other branch—though more successful than the phylum which contains the earth worms—never was destined to give rise to any other group. This phylum is represented by the clam, the squid,

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the cuttle-fish, the octopus, and many more too numerous to mention. The phylum, of which the earth worm is an example (called phylum Annelida) is clearly segmented. The earthworm moves about by the contractions of the muscular body wall. It is interesting to note that the respiratory pigment in the vertebrate is identical with the respiratory pigment found in the Annelids.

Let us conclude our journey up the animal tree with a brief consideration of the Arthropoda phylum; this is the phylum in which we find such important members as the insects, the various eight-legged spiders, the many-legged centipedes, the cray fishes, and other less important forms.

The Arthropods have had an unusual amount of success on dry land. If we consider the number of species as a criterion from which we can measure the success of an animal, then we must invariably arrive at the conclusion that the insects are the most successful of all the land animals. A typical member of the Arthropod phylum has a hard covering on the outside of his back. He has a respiratory system which consists of a complex system of branching air tubes. Let us close our discussion of the family tree with the following observation. Namely, that only because of the fact that a branching respiratory system does not allow for a huge body structure, is man and not the insects the rulers of this earth.

The Editor's Notebook

A CONFIDENTIAL CHAT WITH THE EDITOR

(Continued from page 6)

ROGER BACON provided the inspiration for Elroy Arno's story "Mistress Of The Dark." It takes place in modern London, during the great air blitz. A bomb opened a secret underground chamber and . . . but read it for yourself. Remember—Bacon invented gunpowder?

DAVID WRIGHT O'BRIEN has a story in this issue—"The Curious Coat"—but it will be one of the last. We have a few more on hand, which we'll give to you from time to time. The fact is, Dave is now in the air force.

THIS week we were hit with a sledge-hammer insofar as the army is concerned. The following writers entered the service, or received notice of entry within weeks: William P. McGivern; Gerald Vance; P. F. Costello; Duncan Farnsworth; John York Cabot; Clee Garson; Arthur T. Harris; James Norman; Craig Ellis; David V. Reed; Clyde Woodruff; Leslie Owens; Peter Horn; Bruce Dennis; Milton Kaletsky; Donald Bern; Clark South; Herman Adkins; Floyd Gale; Lawrence Hamling. We're going to miss those boys!

LEROY YERXA'S offering, "The Garden Of Hell" was written around a very swell illustration by Virgil Finlay. We think you'll like both. The story has an old theme, but it is well handled and developed.

TARLETON FISKE returns to our pages with "The Skeleton In The Closet". It has a rather amazing climax—and entirely unexpected. A lot of humor and horror in this one. And neither is of the "ghastly" type!

FROM private to colonel in five years! Fantastic, but true. That is the brilliant accomplishment of Donald M. Keiser, whose career was brought to an untimely end by his death in North Africa last December 11. Five years ago he was a private in the Air Corps. In 1939 at the age of 25 he won his pilot's wings. He flew a Flying Fortress in the Philippines and won the D. F. C., and then added an Oak Leaf Cluster for bombing a Jap battleship January 9, 1942. In Java he was awarded a Silver Star for saving a fellow officer in the face of enemy fire, then won an Oak Leaf Cluster to add to it. He became chief of staff of the Bomber Command in Major General Lewis H. Brereton's Middle East Air Force. His death at the age of 28 robbed the U. S. Army of its youngest colonel.

WHAT would you do if you saw a "goniophotometer"? Eat it, kill it, play with it, what would you do with it? You could do none of these (except play with it—if you really care to), for goniophotometry is the highly useful activity of measuring the light reflected from painted surfaces at various angles.

While peacetime finishes generally aimed at glossy qualities, war paint must avoid tell-tale reflection of the sun's rays. Even if paint may appear dull under a high sun, when the light strikes at a small angle (as when the sun is low), the drab coating can become mirror bright.

Paint research laboratories, by perfecting the goniophotomer, have found easy measures of this reflection power. In a few minutes, from any angle, specially developed military paints can thus be tested.

AT last, the news oyster lovers may or may not have been waiting for! There is no longer any scientific objection to your eating them in a month without an "R" in it. The eating habits of thousands of gourmets who from May through August had forsaken their favorite sea food may now be revolutionized.

The idea about not eating oysters during the warm months took hold because they spoil easily —especially if shipped inland. But thanks to modern refrigeration spoilage is no longer a problem.

However, before you rush down to your favorite grotto, a word of caution. In the summer a young oyster's fancy lightly turns to thoughts of spawning, and so the quality of the oysters

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you eat won't be as good as the ones served you in the "R" months.

YOUR baby may have weighed as much as nine pounds but a whale had a baby that weighed eight tons or sixteen thousand pounds. It seems impossible that a whale can carry so enormous a weight but this is made possible because whales live in a supporting medium. The weight of the child is borne by the water and not by the whale mother. This can best be understood by realizing that we can float in water or we can carry a heavy person in water; we would be unable to do so on land.

This little sixteen thousand pound baby is nursed with white milk similar to that found in cows. It may resemble cow's milk but it certainly does not taste like it. Nevertheless, whales are mammals and hence suckle their young. This, to be sure, is done on dry land near the water, or at least on the shore. Unfortunately, the early whale hunters killed the whales when in this state and so the great whale herds began to disappear. This situation has been corrected to a great extent by the national governments of many lands.

"IT runs off as water from a duck's back"—this is a common expression. Why don't ducks get wet?

Ducks and certain other waterfowls don't get wet because their feathers are kept in an oily condition by small oil glands. And oil is a repellant of water.

During a rain, or while paddling about in a pond, ducks frequently bend back and rub oil on their heads from the glands at the base of the tail. They then oil their feathers with their heads.

In addition to being supplied with oil, the feathers of a duck are exceedingly close together, a fact which aids considerably in keeping out the water.

The common simile ". . . as water from a duck's back" now assumes scientific meaning, no doubt.

THE name "Leatherneck" typifies the tough, sinewy physique and fighting ability of the U. S. Marine. And properly so. It was originated in the days when hand-to-hand sea fights were frequent on splintered, blood-stained decks.

Marines then wore a heavy, rigid collar similar to that of the gorget during the regime of knights in steel armor. It protected the throat and the jugular vein from the thrust of pikes and the slash of cutlasses when the Marines hurtled down the sides of their own ship to the enemy's deck.

Today the old leather neckpiece is symbolized by the high collar of the Marine's dress or "blue" uniform. In addition to being Leathernecks, the Marines may appropriately be said to be as tough as leather from head to foot.

WHEN we think of mummies, we immediately think about Egypt, which is the only place where they exist—that is, until you learn about our early American mummies.

Yes, in the land of the Navajo Indians there exists a huge catacomb of real American mummies called the Cañon de Tsáy-ee. Long ago, these cliffs were inhabited by Pueblo Indians, who made their homes here so as to be safe from their enemies. In these houses there remain many relics of the past, and some embalmed bodies of the dead.

That it was a common custom to mummify the dead is proved by the fact that many other mummies are to be found in parts of New Mexico, Colorado, and Utah where other branches of the same race of Indians lived.

IF you ever got a ticket for passing a light you didn't see, and if you ever were reprimanded roughly by a traffic cop (with his foot on your running-board usually), you probably won't appreciate the following. Read it and, mostly likely, curse it!

The first traffic police squad was the famous old "Broadway Squad" of New York City organized in 1860. This was the first unit of the Police Department to have special functions in the field of traffic regulation. The members of this squad were stationed along Broadway from Bowling Green to 59th Street, and were assigned to general police work. Their posts were at the intersections of Broadway and the cross streets —but on the sidewalks.

The Broadway pavement of that time was of cobblestones and most of the traffic consisted of slow-moving horsedrawn carriages and wagons.

MANY people do not realize that the queen honey-bee has a sting as powerful as the best of 'em. Although the worker bees are the real defenders of the hive, the queen, too, uses her "stinger" on occasion.

The sting of the queen honey-bee differs from that of the worker in being longer, curved, and having few and shorter barbs on the lancet. The sting of the worker bee, it is known, is easily torn from its body when the sting penetrates an object beyond the barbs (which extend backward as does the barb on a fish-hook.) The sting of the queen, on the other hand, is more firmly attached and is rarely torn off.

The queen honey-bee seldom uses her sting, however. But when she does. . . .! Using her tremendous stinging power on rival queens (occasionally on the bee-keeper, too), the queen bee's belligerent drive is so strong that it will often sting other queens that have been dead for a considerable length of time when brought into contact with them.

Once you start 'em, it's hard to stop 'em!

THAT ends our Notebook for now. We'll be back next issue with more of the same. Meanwhile, no matter what the war does to us at home, let 'er come. We can take it! And we'll dish it out too! Axes to the Axis! *Rap*

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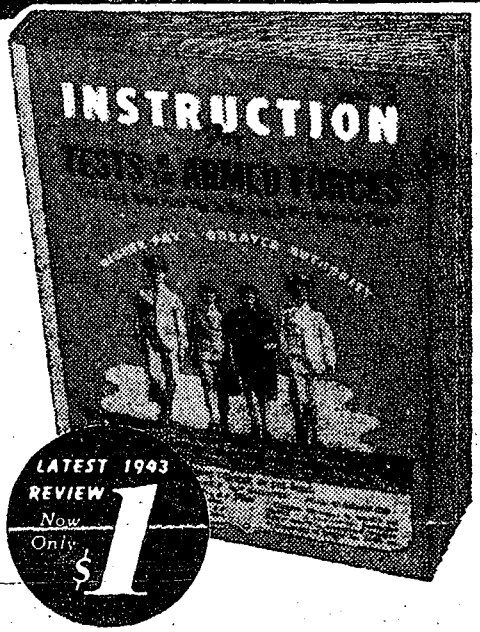

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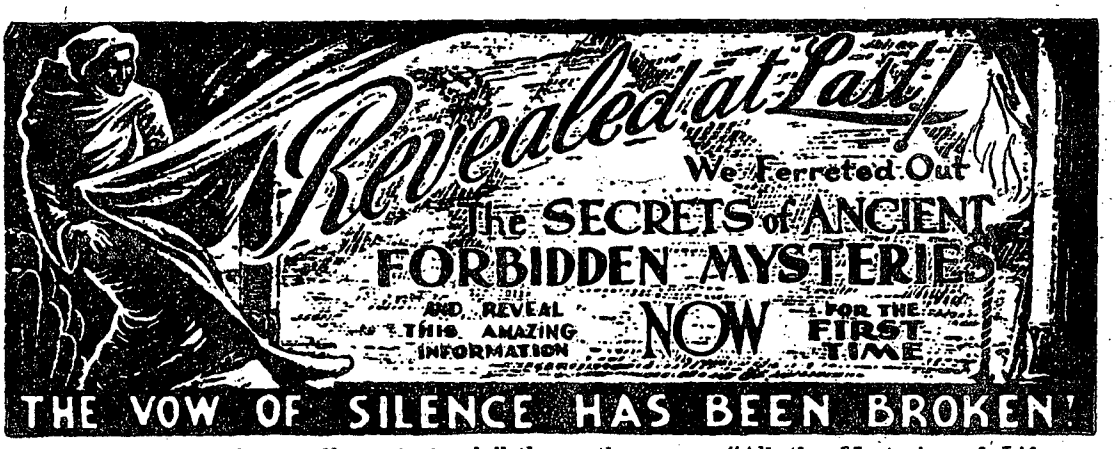

"The 7 Keys to Power alleges to teach," the author says, "All the Mysteries of Life from the Cradle to the Grave—and Beyond. It tells you the particular day and hour to do anything you desire, whether it be in the light of the moon, sun, or in total darkness."

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He claims, "It is every man's birthright to have these things of life: MONEY! GOOD HEALTH! HAPPINESS! If you lack any of these, then this book has an important message for you. No matter what you need, there exists a spiritual power which is abundantly able to bring you whatever things you need."

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ROMANCE OF THE

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ELEMENTS---Oxygen

OXYGEN is number 8 in the International Table of Atomic Weights. Its symbol is O and its atomic weight is 16.000. It is an odorless, tasteless, colorless gas. Its density is 0.001429. Oxygen can be liquefied at —119° C. and 50 atmospheres pressure. Liquid oxygen has a pale blue color and is magnetic. It boils in an open vessel at —182.5° C. It is slightly soluble in water. Oxygen is a very active element, and combines with many substances; is the basis of almost all combustion.

NEXT MONTH—The Romance of Neon

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»»» Introducing «««
THE AUTHOR

William Brengle

A LONG time ago I wrote my first story. It was truly a pip; all about a government agent who was assigned to break up a Chinese dope ring in San Francisco. Actually, I knew nothing about the Chinese, dope-rings, San Francisco or government agents. But, since it ran in the high school paper back in Tulsa, Oklahoma, neither did my readers. As a result, the story was well-received—so well, in fact, that when, after the first instalment appeared, the principal of the school tried to ban further episodes, the student body drew up a petition demanding its continuance! They won—and since then I've been carried along in the writing field on the confidence my first readers gave me!

"Return to Lilliput" is my first shot at the fantasy field. I've been selling regularly to most of the detective magazines in the East since 1937, and while I'm a long way from owning my own yacht, I've at least got a rowboat!

When *Mammoth Detective* first came to my notice, I decided that, since it appears to be the best of its kind in the field, I'd like to take a shot at it. I felt it out by sending in a short-short called "Murder Confesses Judgment," and not only did the editor buy it, but he sent along a letter stating that he knew of my work and would I care to submit further stories. Then, without warning, came a photo-static copy of the cover of this issue and a request to try my hand at plotting and writing a fantasy—a field entirely foreign to me. The girl on the cover fascinated me so completely that I did my darndest to make the yarn worthy of her. You'll have to decide whether I succeeded . . .

I was born in Tulsa, Oklahoma in December, 1908. My education, from a "book-larnin'" standpoint ended after my graduation from high school. For a year or two I tried my hand at learning the oil refining business, then decided that the "horny-handed" part of being a "horny-handed son of toil" didn't appeal to me.

For three years I wandered about most of the forty-eight States. During that time I worked at almost every kind of job you can think of—and a few that you can't! Finally, in 1929, I found a job that suited me—payroll clerk, and then paymaster, for a South Chicago steel company. A year later, I married me a wife, on the theory that two can live as cheaply as one. And so they can—for half as long!

When Bill, Junior, came along Ol' Debbil Money raised his ugly head; i.e., I had to have some to get my wife out of the hospital. As a last, wild resort, I sat down and wrote a twelve thousand word detective story in fourteen consecutive hours, sent it, air-mail, to one of the Eastern magazine chains, with a letter explaining my predicament. Whether it was the story or the letter that turned the trick, I'll never know—but I got a check—and my wife!

Afterward, I said to myself, "How long has this been going on?" So, very quickly, I wrote half a dozen more detective yarns and sent them, one at a time, to the same company that had bought my first. And, one at a time, all six came back. The first five carried the usual rejection slips; but the sixth had with it a note from the editor along the lines that I was evidently writing stories as fast as I could hit the keys, and not paying any attention to what I was saying. I said, "The guy's nuts!" and read the rejected manuscripts. He wasn't. So I re-wrote them all—and sold 'em!

Whether I write any more fantasy fiction will depend, I imagine, on the reception "Return to Lilliput" receives from you fans. Anyway, I tried . . .

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READER'S PAGE

PRAISE FOR OWEN

Sirs:

It's a rare occasion when I write to praise or to criticize your stories but I feel compelled to let you know that "Tomorrow's Mail" by Leslie Owen was one of the best s.f. stories I've ever read, and I've read literally thousands, I've been reading and enjoying this type of fiction for many, many years, almost as long as the magazine has been published. Your mag is one of the best and is on my "must" list. Also, your companion magazine, *Amazing Stories,* is top-notch. Keep repeating, if you can, those past Classics. A good story never gets old.

DAVID HUNTER
1125 So. Winnebago Street
Rockford, Ill.

Owen's "Tomorrow's Mail" is the type of story that is reprinted in the anthologies of science fiction. It belongs in the same category with "Mr. Hibbard's Hat," "Return of Joan of Arc" and "The Fisherman." Science fiction fans are quick to praise such.—ED.

NO MISTAKE

Sirs:

I have found a way to increase the enjoyment of FANTASTIC ADVENTURES about 50%, cut down the complaint department 75% and eliminate my pet peeve 100%. The secret: why, just gather all your artists into one bunch and teach them to read!

Take, for example, the picture on page 74 illustrating the story "They Gave Him a Rope". Look at it. (Yes, do; I'm tired of looking at it.) The story very plainly states that Joe was alone in the boiler room of a hotel when he studied the rope. The picture shows Joe crouching behind a desk in an overstocked room, with a very dead corpse, secret panels, mysterious hands and oversized guns. Now, I ask you, is that logical? Of course, you might be running one of those "Find the Mistakes" contests. But shouldn't you warn your readers first?

The stories this issue were all swell. Liked "The Enchanted Bookcase" best. Always did like swords. Lefty Feep was good, as usual. And Jones and Abner Small were lots of fun. I liked the idea behind "Trail of the Magic Slippers." On the whole, give me all your stories and very few of your illustrations. And wish you could make them jibe and make me happy.

And don't blame your secretary for not finding the mistakes. She takes *too* good care of you!

RITA C. CARMELLE,
6558 Cottage Grove,
Chicago, Illinois.

We respectfully suggest that you re-read "They Gave Him a Rope." The illustration depicts the circumstances under which Joe makes his escape from the fourth dimension. Jones faithfully reproduced the entire scene. . . . We never blame our secretary for anything. She won't permit it! —ED.

WILCOX . . . AND SHAKESPEARE!

Sirs:

I have been reading FANTASTIC ADVENTURES since it first appeared on the newsstands. About three months ago I became disgusted with your whole magazine. But last week I got an irresistible urge to read it again. I went out and bought the January, February and March issues. I just couldn't help myself. I read all the short stories first, and I must say that I am very happy to have found FANTASTIC ADVENTURES again.

After having read "The Man With Five Lives," I just had to write to you. I say that it is the best story I have ever read in your magazine. Maybe it's because it was so different from all other stories you have published. I had to think about the story for about half an hour before I could say that I knew what it was all about. The ingenious way in which it was presented added immensely to my decision. Putting you in the story, Rap, was such a simple thing to do, but Clyde Woodruff thought of it first and he deserves all honors. Let's have more of this fascinating author. I liked all the other stories in the issue except for "Sammy Calls a Noobus." This is the worst story I have ever read between your covers.

Tell Don Wilcox not to feel bad about the boners in "The Ice Queen." Shakespeare has done the same thing and he is still one of the most famous authors.

The Lefty Feep yarns are wonderful. Those puns and rhymes slay me. McGivern has found his master in Robert Bloch.

Let me finish by saying that I am sorry for having deserted you and that I will never do it again.

THOMAS LILJEDAHL,
862 Amsterdam Avenue,
New York, N. Y.

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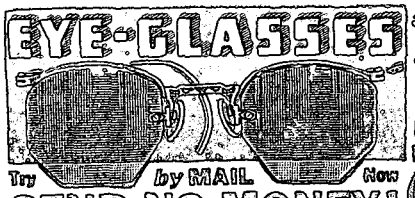

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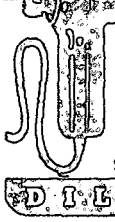

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FILL IN AND MAIL—TODAY!

Welcome back to the fold, Tom. Perhaps we deserved your decision to leave us, but we can't figure out just how. . . . Your disapproval of Norton's "Sammy Calls a Noobus" is surprising. We, and most of our readers, thought it one of the best.—ED.

WOODRUFF . . . AND KIPLING!

Sirs:

Congratulations! "The Man With Five Lives" is really a grand piece of work. You're really starting the year off the right way.

Some of the readers may object that the story was hard to follow . . . but the same can be said for much of Kipling, and Kipling was a great author.

For once, the rest of the issue was also good. Even the cover yarn was excellent! Wilcox, in fact, gets second place. Third, as usual, to Lefty Feep.

PAUL CARTER,
156 South University Street,
Blackfoot, Idaho.

HUNTER SEES IT THROUGH

Sirs:

Taken as a whole, the March FANTASTIC was only fair. Your lead story was, as all of Dwight Swain's are, pretty poor. That even Palmer could let such a childish yarn slip between the pages of a magazine surprises me.

The best in the entire issue was William P. McGivern's "The Enchanted Bookshelf." Very timely it was, too. I read it this afternoon (January 26), and just this morning the paper came out with the news of the rebellion in Marseille. In the story, D'Artagnan says: "We are going to fight for France—but we are going to fight for France *in* France, on the soil of our own country." Of course, we'll know by the time this letter is published whether the rebellion was a flop like the Allied "invasion" of the French coast; but it makes you think, anyway.

Next, I think I will place Costello's "The Man Who Cried Werewolf." Nicely told, snappy ending—everything to make it a swell short.

Next is very close between "They Gave Him a Rope," by Carleton, and "Trail of the Magic Slippers" which was neatly told by John York Cabot. The former has a slight lead, I believe.

Fifth, and also a nice story, is "The Black Brain," followed none too closely by "Tomorrow's Mail." "The Chance of a Ghost" rates seventh, which ends the list of good stories. That leaves three wholly unnecessary yarns, and a majority of the fans will agree with me, I'm sure.

As to your illustrators, Jackson was good this time for "Drummers of Daugavo," and he is almost always good in grease pencil; but his straight pen and ink stuff is consistently poor in quality, with his other drawings for this issue no exception. Bilder was pretty good, although I gathered that the canine in question was, or at least resembled, a wolf. But Bilder makes a bull dog out of it. Robert Jones was better than usual, and Magarian was, of course, tops. St. John's pic would have been good if done by anyone but

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him, but he really isn't suited for this type of illustration.

Both covers were only fair, this one being Paul's best of the series. How about the only real fantasy artist on the front cover soon? I mean none other than Virgil Finlay. Get some of his interiors soon, too. He's tops!

Most fans, including me, have gone over big for Woodruff's swell yarn in the January issue. This was the only really outstanding story you've printed in F.A. this year. At that rate you'll average only four outstanding, or classic, stories a year, which isn't enough. By the way, I understand Don Wilcox is doing a sequel to "The Eagle Man," one of the few stories I ever read that warrants one. Publish it soon, please. Wilcox is great, but he certainly slipped up on "The Ice Queen," as Mr. Kaynor points out.

Carter's right about Nat Schachner. He did "Return of Circe," didn't he? He's a swell author too, and should be seen in both your mags, as should Frank Patton.

I am on my ragged knees thanking you for publishing my radical letter in the February issue, and for inviting a poll on trimmed edges.

GENE HUNTER,
616 East McCarty Avenue,
Jefferson City, Mo.

Wilcox plans a sequel to "The Eagle Man," but just how far he's gone with it, we do not know. . . . Your rating for the March issue seems to compare well with those of other readers.—ED.

ANOTHER WOODRUFF FAN

Sirs:

Just a few lines to say I think you've really hit the jackpot with that new writer, Clyde Woodruff. "The Man With Five Lives" was an unusual story and that's putting it mildly. If I could cheer through this letter, I would do so, loud and lustily; and I'm begging with tears in my eyes, let's have more, one in every issue—please!

MARIE MORGAN,
Arundel Hotel,
Baltimore, Md.

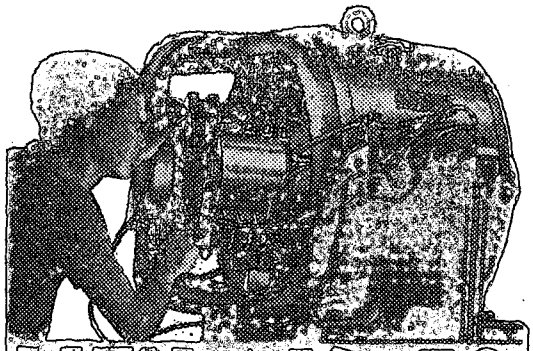
TEN BEST IN '42

Sirs:

It is with some reluctance that I write this letter, for I would far rather praise than complain. However, occasionally, an issue comes out that is definitely under par. This happens to the best of magazines, and now, with the March number, it has happened to F.A.

I could find only one truly good story, but that yarn was almost good enough to make up for the rest of the issue. I'm speaking of William P. McGivern's "Enchanted Bookshelf"—a fascinating tale if there ever was one. I didn't know McGivern had it in him. No sequel is needed, by the way; that would spoil the story.

Also on the credit side of the ledger are: "The Black Brain," "Tomorrow's Mail," and "They Gave Him Rope." The Costello yarn was sort of in between—not good, not bad.



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The others we'll simply skip. They're not worth commenting on. Though I will mention that "Drummers of Daugavo" was the worst story I have read in months. It is one of those "miserable flops" that Paul Carter refers to in the "Reader's Page." No more, please.

Paul did a swell job on the back cover, far surpassing Jones' crude effort on the front cover. The last two covers have shown, respectively, a gorilla with a girl in his big, hairy arms, and an Amazon lifting a Nazi by the seat of his pants. Fantasy? Definitely not!

St. John and Magarian share top honors for the interior pix this time. And, while on the subject of artists, I'll scream if somebody spells Virgil Finlay's name "F-i-n-l-e-y" again! Please, folks, it's spelled with an "a," not an "e."

At this point, I have dragged down my files of F. A., intending to point out several outstanding stories, inviting you to compare them with the hack this issue has to offer. Before I could stop myself, I had jotted down the 10 best yarns of 1942 from FANTASTIC ADVENTURES. So here they are, exactly three months late:

1. "The Eagle Man," by Don Wilcox. This story has drawn so much favorable comment that more is hardly necessary. A real classic.

2. "When Freemen Shall Stand," by Nelson S. Bond, Bond's best since the "Ultimate Salient," back in August, 1940.

3. "Doorway to Hell," by Frank Patton. Were it not for the high competition, this would have been an easy first. A swell serial.

4. "War on Venus," by Edgar Rice Burroughs. Burroughs is . . . Burroughs. Where is Edgar R. now, by the way? When does F. A. get another story by the master?

5. "Dwellers of the Deep," by Don Wilcox. Just appealed to my feeble mind. I enjoyed it very much.

6. "The Leopard Girl," by Don Wilcox. Wilcox again, with another swell yarn. How does he do it?

7. "Union in Gehenna," by Nelson S. Bond. Delightfully crazy.

8. "Mademoiselle Butterfly," by Don Wilcox. *Mr. Wilcox!* You again? And with another splendid tale. You amaze me, sir!

9. "Daughter of Thor," by Edmond Hamilton. Typical Hamilton fantasy—how about some more? A lot more.

10. "Hok Visits the Land of Legends," by Manly Wade Wellman. The best of a swell series. Where is the caveman-with-heap-much-brains now? We want more Hok.

And that is that. Let's hope that 1943 is as good a year as was 1942. With the exception of "The Man With Five Lives" is hasn't been as good a year so far. There's still time, though.

CHAD OLIVER,
3956 Ledgewood,
Cincinnati, Ohio.

Don Wilcox, who, in your poll, carried off '42 honors, has several fine stories ready for publication this year. The June issue will feature his "World of the Paper Dolls," which we believe to

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be one of the best he's ever done. You'll find him in the June AMAZING STORIES which will carry his "The Earth Stealers"—also of "classic" potentialities. . . . Since "Skeleton Men of Jupiter," no further manuscripts have been received from Mr. Burroughs, but others have been promised.—ED.

READS ALL THREE

Sirs:

I thought I would write and tell you how much I enjoy reading your magazine. I also read *Mammoth Detective* and *Amazing Stories.* I started reading your books about three months ago. As I had missed quite a few of your issues, I went to a second-hand book store and bought back issues. I now have all of *Mammoth Detective,* and quite a few of FANTASTIC ADVENTURES and *Amazing Stories.*

In the March issue of F.A., I place your stories in this order:

1. "Drummers of Daugavo."
2. "The Chance of a Ghost."
3. "Trail of the Magic Slippers."
4. "The Enchanted Bookshelf."

The rest of your stories were about the same. Of the features, I like the Editor's Notebook the best. I am reading the November, 1942 issue of your magazines and I think that Nelson S. Bond's "When Freemen Shall Stand," is one of the best stories I have ever read. Won't you try to have a complete novel at least every two or three months?

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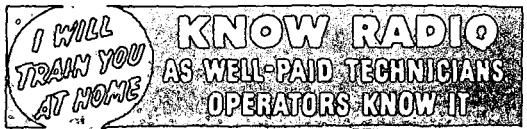

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Martha Van Dyke, 1005 Cobb Ave., Kalamazoo, Michigan, age 17, wishes to correspond with boys and girls everywhere . . . Michael Andrews, 7304 Tioga St., Pittsburgh, Pa., 17 years old, wants to have pen pals living in Central and South America, Africa, Alaska, or any other country outside of the U. S. . . . Anyone who can see can be an amateur astronomer. Further information about the hobby of Astronomy may be secured from "World Astronomy Club"—Secretary: Mr. Abraham Oshinsky, 108 Fort Greene Place, Brooklyn, N. Y. . . . Helene Nathan, 1651 Montgomery Ave., Bronx, N. Y., is Flight Leader of a small flight of girls. She would like to hear from other girls who would like to join her flight. They build model airplanes and learn about real ones. Members must be between 10-16 years old . . . Laura Tagg, R.F.D. 2, Allegan, Mich., wants pen pals. Her hobbies are Large Letter Cards, Advertising Pencils and Buttons . . . Jerry Frankel, 441 Alabama Ave., Brooklyn, N. Y., is interested in trading scarce stamps for books, catalogues and price lists of ancient and medieval English coins, also back issues of coin magazines, and fine 19th century stamps and covers, and fine ancient and medieval silver coins . . . Anyone having the following issues of AMAZING STORIES write G. L. Roberts, Jr., Fairfield, N. C.: From 1939—January, September, October. From 1940—January, August, September, December. From 1942—January, February, March, April, May, June, July, August, September and October . . . Tom Ludowitz, 2310 Virginia, Everett, Wash., is sending out a new complete book list of the novels by Burroughs. List Free. . . . Donald A. Dow, 617 Eggert Rd., Buffalo, N. Y., 19, has just recovered from a long illness and would like to correspond with all his old correspondents or new ones. Will answer all letters. . . . Miss Florence Abel, R. R. 2, Box 120, Mt. Healthy, Ohio, wants pen pals in the service. . . . T. D. Gray, 171 Fullerton Ave., Newburgh, N. Y., wants to sell the following issues of Amazing Stories: Nov. and Dec., 1927 and Jan. to Nov. inclusive for the year 1928. . . . Howard Moore, 12210 Meyers Rd., Detroit, Mich., would like to hear from all interested in becoming members of his recently founded club for those interested in witchcraft, ghosts, mental telepathy, and other psychic phenomena, which is now called "Aicippa." He will be glad to answer all questions and will reply to all letters immediately. Anyone between 15-19 everywhere is welcome. . . . Miss Mary V. Durant, Calico Rock, Ark., 20 years old, would like to correspond with service men, but everyone is welcome. . . . Max Belz, Waldoboro, Maine, has back numbers of most all scientifiction from 1936 to date to dispose of at original price plus postage and wants to engage in correspondence chess with good players in 4 game series.

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The CENTAUR—Steed of the Gods

By MORRIS J. STEELE

Perhaps one of the most fantastic of all legendary creatures is the centaur, whose association with romance comes from its task as steed of the love god

(See Back Cover.)

ACCORDING to Greek mythology, the Centaurs were a race of beings, part man and part horse, dwelling in the mountains of Thessaly and Arcadia. They were said to be the offspring of Ixion and Nephele.

In early art they were represented as human beings in front, with the body and hind legs of a horse attached to the back. Later, they were men only to the waist.

On the day of the marriage of Deidameia to Peirithous, king of the Lapithae, they attempted to carry Deidameia off. Peirithous was himself a son of Ixion. The resultant battle has come down through the years as a legend. The battle of the Centaurs with the Lapithae is told in story and song.

The Centaurs have been pictured by artists as drawing the chariot of Dionysus, in allusion to their drunken habits. However, their vice of drunkenness was not their most famed. They were associated with Eros in most of his amorous escapades and acted as his transportation to and from his rendezvous with fair maidens. As a result, they became very amorous themselves.

On our back cover, artist J. Allen St. John has attempted to take into consideration many of the stories of the Centaurs, including the less-mentioned fact that there were female Centaurs as well as male, and their wild, reckless, warlike character.

Here we see a female Centaur, battling with one of the monster dragons which seemed to have overrun the earth at that period of legendary history. She demonstrates her savage nature by facing it fearlessly with no other arm than a club.

The Centaurs were famed, in spite of their association with so amorous a personage as Eros, for their inhospitable nature. With the exception of Pholus and Cheiron, who seemed possessed of a real and decent love, the Centaurs were wild savages who were slaves of their animal passions, and allowed them full rein.

They are more obviously explained by a fancied resemblance to the shapes of clouds, or as the spirits of rushing mountain torrents, or winds, etc.

Perhaps the likeliest suggestion is that they were the distorted recollection of some savage tribe, reputed by its neighbors to be composed of monsters.

The battles and amours of men and gods with the Centaurs typify the struggle between civilization and barbarism.

Even today the legend of the Centaur persists in reality, and repeatedly stories have come from wild places of the earth affirming that Centaurs actually do exist and have been seen. Which would seem to indicate that this legendary creature is one of the most firmly fixed in the minds of men, and the most widely spread over the face of the earth. Certainly their predominance must mean something fairly definite; namely: that the Centaurs actually did exist.

If they did, what were they really like? Certainly not half human and half animal. The answer must be that some four-legged animal at some time in the period of evolution, developed a pair of arms at the shoulders, and thus gained a startling resemblance to the upper half of the human figure.

These creatures, which may not have lasted long in nature's scheme of things, might have spread over the known world, and been seen by many tribes, while they lurked in the forests, outcasts of both other groups of animals and of the world of men.

This would account for the reputation of savagery they gained, since any encounter with human beings must have resulted in instant conflict, and an effort on the part of the human beings to destroy them, This urge would be natural when backed up by superstitious fear.

One wonders at the reputation, therefore, which connects them with Eros and with amorous and sentimental things. How did that come about?

The most obvious answer is again human observation. The antics of these Centaurs, while unconscious of human observers, nuzzling about as horse-like animals do, must have seemed very human-like when the arms are taken into consideration. It must have appeared as though the Centaurs were engaged in a very human lovemaking.

In our modern times, perhaps Walt Disney, with his "Fantasia" has given the Centaur the most prominent revival of all. In this creation, he has removed all the savage, inhospitable, vicious characteristics, and left only an exaggerated conception of the happy, amorous, and entirely human Centaur.

Which is as it should be. We'd like to forget the Centaur of our ancestors!

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PARTIAL LIST

of the Rare, Exhilarating and Hilarious

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by George Jean Nathan
It isn't true what they say about the gay bachelors. This leads us to the conclusion that a bachelor is a man who thinks before he acts, and then doesn't act!

LIFE IN HOLLYWOOD
by Frank Sullivan
Sultry, glamorous screen sirens fall in love at first sight with amazing rapidity. Love in Hollywood is unpredictable. And that's what makes for zest and adventure there.

JUST A FREUDY CAT
by Jack Hanley
"Or Memoirs of a Freudian Nightmare," is the subtitle of this section. The author goes through a series of dreams that are shocking to the point of blushing (all in the dreams).

THE PLAYBOY AT FIFTY
by Dr. Edwin F. Bowers
At fifty many of us don't have half the sense that God gave a chipmunk. We spend our energy as a drunken sailor on leave spends his hard-won gold.

THE 99 44/100% PURITANS
by Duncan Underhill
Marriage and the conjugal relations were utilitarian considerations closely connected with the problem of keeping warm in the long cold winters, so *Tarrying* and *Dundling* kept the Pilgrims warm and happy.

MR. PREBLE GETS RID OF HIS WIFE *by James Thurber*
How Mr. Preble accomplished his objective without benefit of Reno, perjury or alimony is Thurber at his very best.

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by William Allan Brooks
A repertoire of anecdotes, jokes, incidents which will make you the life of the party. *Try a few of them the next time* you are invited out and you will discover why the charming hostess always falls in love with a good story-teller.

HAVE FUN WITH YOUR CLOTHES ON *by W. A. Brooks*
A challenge to the intrepid playboy to try some of these tricks on his stubborn friends.

ADVICE TO A YOUNG MAN ON THE CHOICE OF A MAIDEN
by Benjamin Franklin
Benjamin Franklin's classic masterpiece, considered the wittiest piece of curiosa of early America, for a long time hidden away in private archives, and only recently released for reading to the general public.

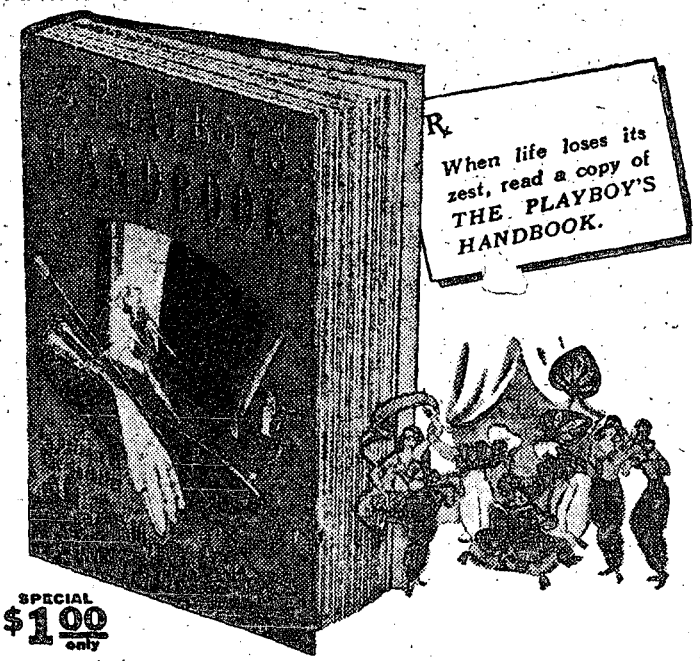
SONGS AND BALLADS,
A mellifluous miscellany.
Here's a convivial collection of virile verse, the kind that mother never taught me. Contains your old favorites and a choice lot of new ones. *To every man* with red blood in his veins comes a yearning sooner or later to stand up on his hind legs and spout poetry. None of that sissy stuff, but real poetry.

LIMERICKS ON PARADE
by Percy Bennett
Here is a selection of old and new limericks, lightly clothed in gay prints, to charm and beguile a drab and care-worn world . . . and you will agree that the best limericks are not necessarily unprintable.

THE GREEKS HAD A YEN FOR IT *by Gilbert Seldes*
They lived and loved in a very familiar way. Ask your friend who studied Greek in college about the well established heteria: and they did all right without benefit of etchings.

WIT AND WISDOM
A miscellany of witticisms comprising the wisdom of *Solomon*, the *art of Casanova*, the cynicism of Shaw and the philosophy of Socrates, who when questioned about the advisability of marriage, answered, "You'll be sorry if you do and you'll be sorry if you don't!"

The entire group studded with a sparkling group of roguish drawings and cartoons!



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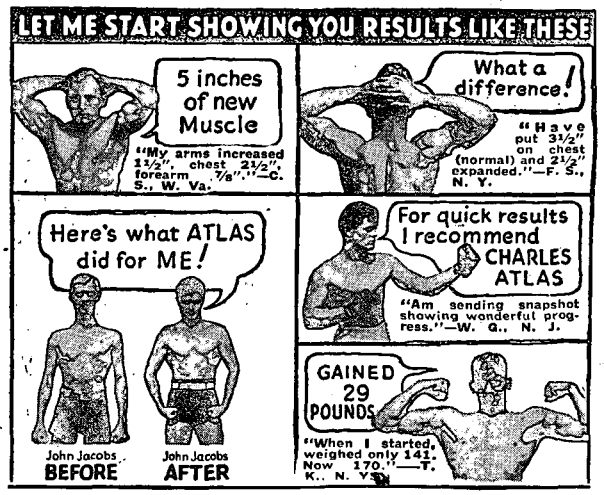

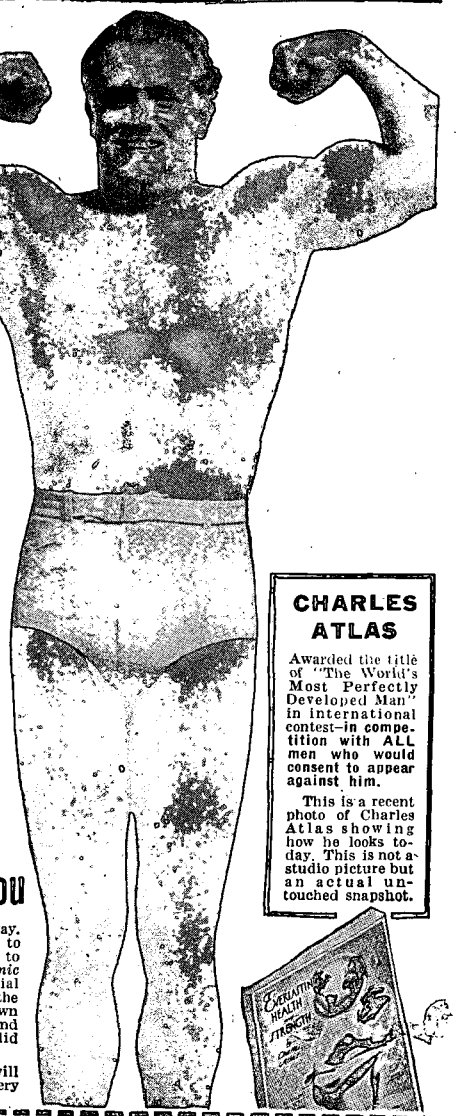

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